Issues in Business Ethics 41

Daryl Koehn
Dawn Elm *Editors*

# Aesthetics and Business Ethics

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*Editors*
Daryl Koehn
Department of Ethics and Business Law
Opus College of Business
University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, MN, USA

Dawn Elm
Department of Ethics and Business Law
Opus College of Business
University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, MN, USA

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# Preface

Only in modern times has the beautiful been divorced from the good. It is time to consider uniting the two once again. *Aesthetics and Business Ethics* is one of the first books to attempt such reconciliation, focusing especially on the context of business. Drawing on cutting-edge research, the book explores the myriad ways in which aesthetics and business ethics can come together to illumine the nature of the firm, moral judgments, the creative process, and wisdom itself. The discussion is both theoretical and practical, showing ways in which the teachers and students of ethics can draw upon art and even create art to reveal hidden aspects of both good and evil.

Minnesota, USA

Daryl Koehn
Dawn R. Elm

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# Contributors

**Rich Brown** Department of Theatre & Dance, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, USA

**John Dobson** Orfalea College of Business, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA, USA

**Craig Dunn** College of Business and Economics, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, USA

**Ronald Duska** Duska Business Ethics Consulting, Villanova, PA, USA

**Dawn Elm** Department of Ethics and Business Law, Opus College of Business, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN, USA

**Daryl Koehn** Department of Ethics and Business Law, Opus College of Business, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN, USA

**Christopher M. Michaelson** Department of Ethics and Business Law, Opus College of Business, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN, USA

**Steven S. Taylor** School of Business, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA, USA

**Sandra Waddock** Carroll School of Management, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA

# Chapter 1
# Introduction

**Daryl Koehn and Dawn Elm**

The discipline of business ethics used to concern itself primarily with the nature or the role of the corporation and the theories that might be applied for evaluating the ethical goodness or rightness of specific actions taken by corporate actors (e.g., ethics of sexual harassment; ethics of privacy). In recent years, the field has moved beyond this rather narrow focus. Discussions of larger social issues, the nature of capitalism, and ethical pedagogy are now far more common. This book of essays contributes to this wider discussion by exploring the integration of aesthetics and the study, practice and teaching of business ethics. Business increasingly is moving away from a traditional rational or scientific paradigm and toward a new perspective, incorporating intuition, emotion, and perception – all aesthetic components – into business thinking. This blend of affect with logic is viewed as a way to enrich business study and practice. We offer an array of perspectives on how this incorporation might proceed.

Such a conversation is overdue, given that ethics and aesthetics have long been thought to overlap. The ancient Greeks treated the noble or beautiful and goodness as two aspects of the same thing. An ethical action was said to be *kalos k'agathos* (beautiful and good). The Greek word *kalon* itself can be and has been translated as noble, beautiful or good (Maurer 2011). For Plato, the good is beautiful and vice versa. This beauty attracts us, and through the stirring of our sensations, can draw us toward a better life if and when we reflect on the basis of the attraction we are experiencing. St. Thomas Aquinas argues that actuality is existence, and existence always manifests as a specific form; goodness and beauty are merely two different aspects of the existence of the same thing. Until recently, the Chinese and Japanese never would have contemplated severing aesthetics and ethics. Throughout much of Asia,

D. Koehn, Ph.D. (✉) • D. Elm, Ph.D.
Department of Ethics and Business Law, Opus College of Business,
University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN, USA
e-mail: koeh4561@stthomas.edu; drelm@stthomas.edu

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aesthetic or perceived qualities were considered to have ethical value. Thus having a “good hand” (i.e., writing well) meant writing in a dynamic way that revealed the truth of the individual writer’s character and spirit (Chiang 2002). Various colors and forms were understood to have ethical valence not only in Asia but also in medieval Western Europe. For example, liturgical green did not merely symbolize hope. It *was* the color of hope.

The good and beautiful became severed only relatively recently. As Israel Knox has shown, the German enlightenment thinkers–specifically, Immanuel Kant, George Hegel, and Arthur Schopenhauer–made beauty metaphysical. That is, for them, beauty became a function of what their system required. Insofar as these systems were intellectual, they shifted the focus away from the beauty of actions and things and toward human judgment, freedom, and self-realization (Israel 1958). In the process, beauty was intellectualized and lost much of its emotional and sensual content and its direct connection with lived life. The problem then became how to relate beauty to human desire and ethics. Insofar as commerce and business were thought of as profit-maximizing or purely material enterprises, the problem of preserving the value of beauty became even more acute: What could beauty possibly have to do with efficiency and productivity?

This sundering of ethics and aesthetics has been, in some respects, ethically worrisome. At one level, the cleaving may threaten the possibility of ethical judgment. Aristotle famously contends that when it comes to making ethical judgments, the decision “rests with perception (aesthesis).” Ethical development gets called into question as well, for the separating of ethics from aesthetics has tended to displace not only beauty but also creative playfulness and the emotions that some have thought lie at the heart of ethical discernment. Through play, children try on roles through which they learn empathy and, more generally, become socialized. Yet those ethics stressing rationality minimize the value of such creative engagement. Buddhists would go even further in opposing any severance of aesthetics and ethics, arguing that the displacement of emotions will destroy ethics because “loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity provide a basis for morality and social conduct.” It is through practicing such emotions – a form of meditation – that we gain insight into ourselves and are able to come to a right conception of self, a conception that, in turn, develops, refines and reinforces our ability to be kind, compassionate, and appropriately joyful. When “excessive rationality and abstraction from the human predicament need a shaking, it can come from the realm of human emotions” (de Silva 1995, p. 118). It was precisely his face to face encounter with human suffering that stimulated and helped to liberate the young Siddhartha. Those religious traditions that celebrate the lives of saints do so in large part because they believe having sensible/aesthetic exemplars encourages and inspires us to act more justly, temperately, wisely, and charitably. So again we see how crucial an aesthetic dimension can be to ethical development.

Of course, we would not deny that emotions and passions, especially strong passions, may also compromise our ability to render sound ethical judgments and to curtail dangerous desires that warp the self. None of the authors in this volume suggest that somehow ethics should abandon practical reason. Rather the arguments are tended as a corrective to the overemphasis during the last 50 years on impartial and dispassionate reasoning and as an invitation for us collectively to rethink and to appreciate what aesthetics can bring to judgment, ethical development and practice itself, especially business practice.

The very brief overview of the history of the relation between the good and the beautiful offered at the beginning of this introduction suffices to show that beauty and aesthetics, like goodness and ethics, are contested terms open to various interpretations. The alert reader will have noted that we have talked about aesthetics without trying to nail down an exact definition of the term. In fact, we have consciously refrained in this volume from offering a univocal definition of any of these contested terms. We do not think it desirable to do so because we want to stimulate discussion about the possible relations (note the plural) among goodness, beauty, ethics, and aesthetics. Defining each of these terms upfront would tend to suppress discussion rather than to open it up. What we *have* tried to do is to solicit essays on various possible aspects or relations of business ethics and aesthetics.

These essays have drawn upon at least five possible common uses of the term "aesthetics". The term can refer to the sensed or perceived aspect of things themselves. Thus, color is an "aesthetic" property of visible things. It can also mean the interest in anything that is sensually pleasing to human beings. For example, one may hear it is said that a particular individual has an "aesthetic" sensibility. Understood in this second sense, aesthetic or sensibly pleasing objects include natural things and organisms as well as manmade objects, actions, speeches, etc. Aesthetics sometimes is construed in a third way as the *study* of sensually pleasing things. Insofar as beauty inheres in the existence of things (a la Aquinas), aesthetics and ontology or the study of actual existences or beings are one and the same. During the Enlightenment, aesthetics acquired a fourth, more specialized meaning: it became the study of how the human mind or reason or even Absolute Spirit is able to make grounded, justifiable judgments about beautiful natural things or works of art and of how art, in turn, enriches ethical judgment. The fifth sense of the word centers on art works: whatever concerns itself with the features or powers of art in general or particular works of art is thought to be "aesthetic."

In this volume, we see many of the above senses of aesthetics in play. We present chapters that examine the value of an aesthetic dimension when it comes to considering the structure of the firm as well as the need for a new aesthetic for viewing business that is not impoverished by a focus on efficiency alone. We then introduce several essays on the possible ways literature can be used to create an enriched canon for capitalism and improve thinking about ethics through its emotional impact. The habits and practices of artists as a means to enhance ethical decision-making in business is the focus of the next chapter. That discussion segues into several essays exploring the value of using arts in the classroom to improve business ethics education. The final chapter of the volume integrates the beautiful, good and true in the search for practical wisdom, thereby inviting further reflection on the future of an aesthetic ethical paradigm.

Part I of the book – *The Need for Reform* – contains three essays arguing for a major change in the ways in which the firm, business activity and the business canon are conceived. John Dobson, in his essay "An Aesthetic Theory of the Firm," eloquently argues that an aesthetic dimension of the firm is needed to foster human flourishing. He contends that the economic and ethical dimensions of the firm alone are inadequate and that firm structure both has and should have an aesthetic dimension, which includes a kind of play. This point holds true at the individual level as well because humans are aesthetic beings. Hence, the evolution from *homo economicus* to *homo aestheticus* is necessary for fully understanding aesthetic value. Steven Taylor's "An Impoverished Aesthetic of Modern Management: Beauty and Ethics in Organizations" beautifully extends Dobson's discussion of the need to recognize beauty in organizations. Taylor argues that business ethics has become impoverished by a focus on aesthetics of efficiency and by ideas wherein all disagreements are removed. He calls for an aesthetic of work based on craft that values the tensions and contradictions inherent in recognizing beauty. This new, richer aesthetic will contribute to more ethical action in business since action is informed by the prevailing aesthetic. The third essay by Christopher Michaelson–"Literature and the Canonical Values of Capitalism"–presents the possibility that reading great literature can inform the capitalist canon. He examines the economic influence on the capitalist canon exerted by Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged" and argues that attention to literature in the arts and humanities and the introduction of new canonical texts (e.g., Leo Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Illych*) could influence ethics practices of capitalism. These three essays intertwine the second, third, fourth, and fifth meanings of aesthetics as a start for a conversation about making significant changes in our thinking about aesthetics in the world of business.

Part II – *Initiating Reform* – features essays critiquing the current way in which business ethics is understood and taught. Dawn Elm's "The Artist and the Ethicist: Character and Process" explores in detail how being present in the moment, when supplemented by courage and a holistic view of the situation rich in emotion and passion, leads to better ethical decision-making. Artists draw upon specific virtues and world views in ways that can and should be incorporated into the process of making meaningful decisions. Ronald Duska's provocative "What's Literature to Ethics or Ethics to Literature?" nicely supplements Elm's piece, for Duska makes the case that ethical theories about duties and consequences may be less effective than works of literature when it comes to altering our understanding and actions. The sensual or aesthetic aspect of literature can have greater emotional impact and thus do more to stimulate thought and reflection than dry, often highly abstract ethical theories. These essays show how the first through fourth senses of aesthetic are mutually supportive.

Part III – *Reform in the Classroom* – presents various views on how aesthetics can be brought into the business ethics classroom and, conversely, how business ethics issues can be integrated through art into the larger liberal arts curriculum. Focused on specific works of art, the essays in this section draw upon the notion of aesthetics understood primarily in the fifth sense. Daryl Koehn's "Ethical Darkness Made Visible" examines the ways in which an art work (in this case, Michael Moore's film "Roger and Me") reveals themes typically ignored in business ethics courses and stimulates the imagination through showing rather than telling.

"*Cheat*: Exporting Business Ethics to Theater Arts", written by Craig Dunn and Rich Brown, lays out in detail how liberal arts students created, wrote and then presented a hugely successful play centered on business ethics issues connected in one way or the other with cheating. Students in business schools could similarly be encouraged to write and to perform short plays featuring business ethics themes.

Part IV – *Reform for More Enriched Lives* – appropriately concludes with an essay by Sandra Waddock – "Wisdom and Responsible Leadership: Aesthetic Sensibility, Moral Imagination and Systems Thinking". Having moved from the need for reforming how we think about business ethics through various concrete ways of instantiating change, we close with Waddock who beautifully weaves together the good, the beautiful and the true. As Aristotle observes, we do not study ethics merely for the sake of clarifying problems. We study ethics with a view to living better, fuller and wiser lives. Similarly, we do not wish to introduce aesthetics into our understanding of business ethics merely to build ever more complex intellectual models of ethics. Rather we wish to enhance our aesthetic sensibility and to improve our ethical judgments in order to live better lives.

We believe that this volume is a step in the right direction toward achieving that *kalos k'agathos* – beautiful and good – objective.

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# Part I
# The Need for Reform

# Chapter 2
# An Aesthetic Theory of the Firm

**John Dobson**

**Abstract** All the firm's a stage. On this institutional stage, many plays are performed simultaneously. The common theme of the plays is human desire: the desire for personal material gain, the desire to bond socially and to achieve status, the desire to do good, the desire to create and experience beauty, etc. When correctly designed, firms are institutional stages that facilitate human flourishing. This correct design has three dimensions: the stage must nurture—and treat as equally valuable—plays in the dimensions of the economic, the moral, and the aesthetic. These dimensions are ontologically fluid and interlaced in the sense that each inevitably rests on the others for ultimate vindication and justification. So, on the institutional stage that is the firm, the play of material gain is only fully justified—in the sense of fostering human flourishing—if its performance is also morally good and aesthetically beautiful. The morality play is only fully justified if it is economically sound and aesthetically beautiful. The challenge humans face in designing firms, therefore, is to design a three dimensional stage that is balanced when viewed from all three dimensions. Sculpturally, the firm should be a perfect sphere: three dimensions of infinite symmetry.

**Keywords** Aesthetic • Education • Stage • Plays

*Something continues to call for art, something in the experience of those who make it and something in the experience of those who seek to apprehend it* (Stewart 2005, p. 17).

J. Dobson, Ph.D. (✉)
Orfalea College of Business, California Polytechnic State University,
San Luis Obispo, CA, USA
e-mail: jdobson@calpoly.edu

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Theories of the firm address basic questions concerning the nature, purpose, and structure of business organizations. These questions have traditionally been addressed by economists in terms of transaction costs, principal-agent relations, and property rights (McMillan (2002) and Roberts (2004)). But even economists accept that these fundamental questions of business ontology stretch beyond the traditional purview of economic theory. For example, Jensen (a founder of modern agency theory) recently noted the "remarkable division of opinion about the fundamental purpose of the corporation" (2001, p. 8).

The protagonists in this division of opinion are often described simplistically in terms of the degree to which they privilege the *economic* over the *ethical* ontological dimensions: in colloquial terms 'stockholders versus stakeholders'. My focus here, however, is on a third dimension that traditionally has been viewed as merely economically instrumental or ethically decorative, namely, the *aesthetic* dimension. I argue that, once correctly conceived, this latter dimension carries equivalent ontological weight to that of the economic or ethical. In practical terms, understanding the economic, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions equally will better enable firms and the actors therein to foster human flourishing.

Both economics and ethics are now generally accepted as dimensions of any valid theory of the firm. Both disciplines address fundamental questions concerning the individual actors within firms, and the structure within which these individuals act. Both disciplines are normative and descriptive in this regard. In the case of the individual, both disciplines have conceptions of who the individual within the firm is and who this individual should be. In economics, the individual *is* susceptible to behavioral biases and bounded rationality; the individual *should be* a rational wealth maximizer. In ethics, the individual *is* a material opportunist and a moral neophyte; the individual *should be* morally enlightened.

In the case of firm structure, both disciplines again offer normative and descriptive conceptions. In economics, the firm *is* a contractual nexus rife with inefficiencies and agency conflicts; the firm *should be* an invisible structure facilitating wealth creation. In ethics, the firm *is* a hierarchical power structure; the firm *should be* a community nurturing human flourishing.

These brief descriptions are obviously caricatures. But they do at least indicate the extent to which the economic and ethical permeate our conceptions of the firm. Although generally not recognized as such, aesthetics is equally fundamental to the firm's nature and purpose. This claim is true both at the level of the individual and at the level of the firm's structure: the individual both *is* and *should be* an aesthetic being; the firm's structure both *does* and *should* accommodate an aesthetic dimension.

This paper reveals *homo aestheticus* as an individual who, in addition to the ethical and economic dimensions, values the aesthetic dimension of business activity. Furthermore, these three dimensions of the individual character are shown to be mutually supportive: particular attention is given to synergies between the aesthetic and ethical dimensions. This paper concludes with a discussion of how the firm can be structured to best nurture the aesthetic dimension of business activity.

## The Aesthetic Dimension

Before addressing the role of aesthetics in contemporary business, this section gives a very brief historical overview of the concept of aesthetics. Although its influence has varied over time and place, aesthetics has never been far from the center of the cultural *zeitgeist* (Chytry 2007). In the introduction to *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, Cazeaux observes that "[a]esthetics has undergone a radical transformation in the last hundred years". He continues:

> Traditionally, the subject [of aesthetics] has always occupied the margins of philosophy, for the simple reason that it deals with those aspects of experience … least amenable to categorization, i.e., art, beauty, emotion, and the ever-changing delights of the senses. However, the divisions imposed on reality by modern reason and changes brought about by the industrialization of experience have necessitated a rethinking of the relationship between the individual and reality. Gone are notions of a distinct self in receipt of a mind-independent world and, in their place, are theses to the effect that consciousness and reality are interconnected at a fundamental level. The aesthetic, formerly exiled from mainstream attention, assumes center-stage as the region to which we can turn for new cognitive possibilities and a sensibility that is critical of the divisions exercised by modern thought. (2000, p. xiii)

Regardless of whether one agrees with Cazeaux's placing of aesthetics at "center-stage", there is no doubt that aesthetics has generally played a significant role in the theatre of philosophy. Pre-Socratic origins of the word "aesthetic" are etymologically derived from the Greek equivalents "to gasp" or to "breath in suddenly" (Onians (1951/1988); the word is also linked to "play" and being "out of time" or "beyond time" in the Heideggerian (1927) sense:

> Phenomena which manifest or appear with the impact of a prominent or memorable emergence…provoke the involuntary intake of breath…A gasp of this order 'stops', as it were, time itself—one is invariably 'breathless' before the emergence of the authentically beautiful…It goes without saying that such provocations to our everyday are more than just "smart and pretty" (Postrel 2003, p. 182), at the very least they launch a thousand ships. (Chytry 2007, p. 40)

In the context of the connection between aesthetics and play, Chytry notes "the vital discovery that Schiller borrowed and expanded from Kant of the aesthetic as focused on the 'free play' of human faculties whenever understanding and imagination are in a state of spontaneous openness or 'indeterminability' prior to being 'constrained' either toward adopting a cognitive or a moral stance" (p. 37).

Kant, perhaps the greatest systematic philosopher of aesthetics, defines it in terms of "the faculty of estimating an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion apart from any interest. The object of such delight is called beautiful" (1790/1952, p. 139). "Apart from any interest" implies that aesthetic judgment does not rest on ulterior utilitarian motives. As Stolnitz puts it, the "aesthetic attitude" is "the disinterested (with no ulterior purpose) and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake" (1960, p. 32). Kieran provides an arboreal illustration:

> We might look at a tree in the garden and be interested in it in terms of what species it is (theoretical interest) or whether it is blocking out the sun and should be cut back

> (practical interest). But we might just sit back and attend to the contours of the trunk and branches, their stratification, the way the leaves rustle and sway gently in the wind, the dappled shadows cast on the bough, the bent-arm-like crook of a branch as it stretches out. In this case we're disinterested since we look at the tree and, if we're lucky, so doing will afford us pleasure. (2005, p. 67)

Nietzsche, the proto-Freudian, argues (contrary to Kant) that the ulterior energy behind "the genesis of art" is "sexual": "every perfection, all the beauty of things, revives through contiguity this aphrodisian bliss [die aphrodisische Seligkeit]" (1888/1967, p. 1). Nietzsche, the futurist, predicted Cazeaux's aesthetic shift by centering his philosophy on aesthetics: "We have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art" (1888/1967, p. 449). Following Nietzsche, Foucault wonders, "[C]ouldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?" (1984, p. 350).

More recently, Genette has invoked Kant by emphasizing the disinterested and contemplative nature of aesthetic appreciation; defining it as "an experience of intransitive, rapt attention on any object which may elicit interest" (1999, p. 20). According to Genette, aesthetic value resides entirely neither in the object or the subject but rather in an empathetic relation between the two: "It is not the object that makes the relation aesthetic, but the relation that makes the object aesthetic" (1999, p. 11). Thus any object, and not just objects officially labeled as "art", can be evaluated on the basis of aesthetic quality.

In summary, the aesthetic dimension—in comparison to the economic and ethical dimensions—is the dimension that values form, style, and surface over substance: "Aesthetics shows rather than tells delights rather than instructs. The effects are immediate, perceptual, and emotional" (Postrel 2003, p. 6). More fundamentally, the aesthetic dimension provides a perspective from which form, style, and surface *are* the ontological substance. Perhaps Nietzsche puts it best in *The Gay Science*: "What is required is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in form, tunes, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial—out of profundity" (1882/1974, p. 38).

## An Aesthetic Theory of the Firm

Support for Cazeaux's claim that we are experiencing an "aesthetics renaissance" can be found in an unlikely place, namely, recent literature on business. Just within the last decade, several books have appeared that claim a growing connection between aesthetics and business (Pine and Gilmore *The Experience Economy* (1999), Dobson's *The Art of Management and the Aesthetic Manager* (1999), Dickinson and Svensen's *Beautiful Corporations* (2000), Austin and Devin's *Artful Making* (2003), Postrel's *The Substance of Style* (2003), and Guillet de Monthoux's *The Art Firm* (2004)). Although radically different in many respects, these books all cite the *aesthetic* as a fundamental tenet of business activity. As such, they provide a foundation from which an aesthetic theory of the firm can be built.

As discussed above, the two fundamental perspectives from which such a theory can be constructed are that of the individual actor within the firm and that of the structure of the firm in which this individual acts. Of course, as Jensen and Meckling famously observe, the firm is a nebulous "nexus of contractual relations among individuals" (1976, p. 311); so the notion of the individual "within" the firm is something of a misnomer:

> Viewed in this way it makes little or no sense to try to distinguish those things which are 'inside' the firm from those things that are 'outside' of it. There is in a very real sense only a multitude of complex relationships (i.e., contracts) between the legal fiction (the firm) and the owners of labor, material and capital inputs and the consumers of output…In this sense the 'behavior' of the firm is like the behavior of the market; i.e., the outcome of a complex equilibrium process. [*Ibid.*]

Not only managers and employees, but also consumers and other external stakeholders, can be viewed as "within" the purview of the firm. All these individuals have an effect on, and are affected by, an aesthetic theory of the firm. In the case of consumers, for example, Dickson and Svensen observe that they "now expect to experience the pleasing sensations of style and beauty from the companies with which they choose to deal" (2000, p. 2). Similarly, Postrel notes that GE believes the global corporate culture is "entering an era in which the look and feel of products will determine their success. Sensory, even subliminal, effects will be essential competitive tools" (2003, p. 2). She argues that the recent experiences of other major corporations bear out GE's prediction. Her list includes Apple Computer's use of bright colors, Target's increasing use of designer products at its retail outlets, and Visa's use of designer credit cards. Postrel quotes Starbuck's CEO, Howard Schultz: "Every Starbucks store is carefully designed to enhance the quality of everything the customers see, touch, hear, smell, or taste… All the sensory signals have to appeal to the same high standards. The artwork, the music, the aromas, the surfaces all have to send the same subliminal message as the flavor of the coffee…" (p. 20).

What, if anything, are the broader cultural implications of this apparent shift in consumer tastes? What does this shift imply about the motivations and fundamental psychological makeup of the individual within and without the firm? As Thaler observes, traditionally "the same basic assumptions about behavior are used in …the theory of the firm…The two key assumptions are rationality and self-interest. People are assumed to want to get as much for themselves as possible, and are assumed to be quite clever in figuring out how best to accomplish this aim" (1992, p. 2). The individual Thaler describes is the familiar *homo oeconomicus* of neoclassical economics. What I argue here is that we should be placing a new individual at the heart of a more descriptively accurate—and prescriptively desirable—theory of the firm; namely, *homo aestheticus*.

## Homo Aestheticus

In his book *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998), Bloom makes the intriguing argument that Shakespeare's plays and sonnets essentially *created* modern man. Through the creation of narratives in which complex characters such as Hamlet and Macbeth "strutted and fretted their hour upon the stage", Shakespeare created and vindicated our conception of the human being as an autonomous multi-faceted character acting in the world and being acted upon. To paraphrase Heidegger (1927), man is a "*being* in time". In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human*, Foucault makes a similar observation regarding the ephemeral nature of our conception of human nature and rationality:

> Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility – without knowing either what its forms will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea. (1973, p. 387)

Similarly, albeit more prosaically, the evolving and broadening theory of the firm can be viewed as a continual re-invention of the human "actor" within the corporate structure. We go from the narrow caricature of *homo oeconomicus* as the opportunistic wealth maximizer, through the more complex and nuanced characters of behavioral economics and business ethics, to the supra-rational *homo aestheticus*. For example, in *The Aesthetics of Organization*, Strati strives to reveal the aesthetic core of business activity. In addition to the familiar cognitive-rational, he emphasizes the aesthetic-empathetic nature of individual activity within the firm:

> The underlying assumption of the aesthetic approach to the study of organizations is that, although an organization is indeed a social and collective construct, it is not an exclusively cognitive one but derives from the knowledge-creating faculties of all the senses… [W]ithin the organization flourish personal idiosyncrasies, specific modes of interpreting events, different views of what to do and when to do it, and the ceaseless negotiation of values, symbols and organizational practices: these refer also to aesthetics. (2000, p. 1)

This broadened, aesthetically inclusive, individual is not devoid of economic and ethical thinking. Returning to the shift in consumer tastes: Pine and Gilmore emphasize the theatrical nature of the consumer experience: "When [the consumer] buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages—as in a theatrical play—to engage him in a personal way" (1999, p. 2). But, in addition to a superficial theatricality, the authors emphasize that these staged experiences are not just entertaining but also frequently explicitly educational and "transformative" in the sense of not just broadening the experiencer's knowledge, but also engendering a moral awakening. Indeed much of the writing about "aesthetic man" recognizes the embedded ethicality of this individual. As Whewell points out, the evaluative grounding of aesthetic judgments—if they are to be socially meaningful and acceptable—inevitably rests on ethical criteria: "The high seriousness of aesthetic value could perhaps be established in two stages: first, by showing that aesthetic preferences are not merely private and personal but may be correct and incorrect: and second, by linking them, if only indirectly, to overriding moral values or some more general notion of the 'good life'" (Whewell 1995, p. 8).

Throughout the history of philosophy, aesthetic value is often taken as conferring ethical value. Murdoch notes that Plato "treats the beautiful as an introductory section of the good" (1980, p. 41). She goes on to argue that the "appreciation of beauty…

is also a completely adequate entry into (and not just analogy [sic.] of) the good life, since it *is* the checking of selfishness in the interests of seeing the real" (pp. 64–65). Hegel argues that "the highest act of reason, the one through which it encompasses all ideas, is an aesthetic act and … truth and goodness only become sisters in beauty" (1835/1842, p. 182). Schiller claims that "logic rests on ethics, and ethics on aesthetics" (1795/1967, p. 189). Nietzsche, in typical grandiose fashion, claims that "the existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon" (1888/1967, p. 449). Voltaire suggests that aesthetic taste "relishes the good, rejects the contrary, and requires force of habit to give it fixed and uniform determination" (1734/1997, p. 5). Dewey notes that "[t]he enemies of the [a]esthetic are neither the practical nor the intellectual. They are the humdrum; slackness of loose ends; submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure. Rigid abstinence, coerced submission… incoherence and aimless indulgence" (1934, p. 50). Nehemas contends that "aesthetic difference and multiplicity, even though it is not often in the service of morality, enriches and improves human life" (1998, p. 10).

The Aristotelian concepts of 'virtue' and 'practice' have also been linked to an ethics of aesthetics. Klein, for example, invokes the idea of a business-management craftsman:

> The ideal of craftsmanship is to create that which has quality or excellence; personal satisfaction, pride in accomplishment, and a sense of dignity derived from the consequent self-development are the motivations. In an 'excellent' company it is this ideal that permeates the firm, and management should provide the moral example of such an ideal; a business management craftsman attempts to create a quality organization, and quality products and services are the result of such an organization. (1998, p. 55)

MacIntyre echoes the point:

> The aim internal to such productive crafts, when they are in good order, is never only to catch fish, or to produce beef or milk, or to build houses. It is to do so in a manner consonant with the excellences of the craft, so that not only is there a good product, but the craftsperson is perfected through and in her or his activity. (1984, p. 284)

Thus the "craftsman" or "craftsperson" can be taken as the archetypal actor on the business stage who combines the economic, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions. This individual can be conceived of as artistically creative in the sense of not just producing a series of commodities. He or she is also a moral actor who recognizes and respects for the traditions of the practice. And finally, this individual produces a material good for a customer. But note well that this "good" is a product, not a commodity: "What immediately distinguishes the craftwork from the commodity is the former's imbeddedness not so much in profit or value-creation motivations as in what used to be celebrated as a 'calling' (*Beruf*) or vocation" (Chytry 2007, p. 42).

In the case of the types of virtues that these artisans might possess, Murdoch provides a list that she believes apply equally to ethics and aesthetics: "I mean such concepts as justice, accuracy, truthfulness, realism, humility, courage as the ability to sustain clear vision, love as attachment or even passion without sentiment or self" (1980, p. 89). In the case of the link between aesthetics and an Aristotelian "practice", Stewart talks of "art's deep commitment to a practice that is truly practice, aesthetic judgments provide a non-teleological paradigm for the ongoing work of ethics" (2005, p. 16). She goes on to make the courageous proposal that "what the practice of art in general might be for is the carrying forward of a practice of ethical encounters between persons" (p. 17). Emphasizing the empathetic nature of the aesthetic relation, she continues: "I suggest that art is an open project, prior to other cultural forms, and vital to our ability to acknowledge other persons. I believe that art therefore might serve as the basis for a global and secular humanism founded on whatever is universal in sense experience and the intelligibility of emotional experience" (p. 5).

In a similar vein, Murdoch emphasizes the ability of aesthetics to transcend personal ego, and to present the viewer with an objective vision of reality:

> I am looking out of my window in an anxious and resentful state of mind, oblivious to my surroundings, brooding perhaps on some damage done to my prestige. Then suddenly I observe a hovering Kestrel. In a moment everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity has disappeared…Good art reveals what we are usually too selfish and too timid to recognize, the minute and absolutely random detail of the world, and reveals it together with a sense of unity and form. Good art shows us how difficult it is to be objective by showing us how differently the world looks to an objective vision…It is a kind of goodness by proxy. (1980, pp. 84–87)

To summarize; we can conceive of *homo aestheticus* as an individual who possesses the virtues necessary to discern aesthetic value. This person's relation to the world, in addition to being economic and moral, is aesthetic as well. In a business context, in making a decision, this individual will not only ask, "Is it profitable? Is it ethical?", but will also ask, "Is it beautiful?" In answering the latter question *homo aestheticus* will be open to and aware of the sensual, pre-rational, empathetic, and emotional dimensions of the decision: e.g., How will the decision affect the aesthetic quality of the lives of those impacted?

This openness and awareness will require a level of empathy and respect for the objects affected by the decision. These objects will be viewed as not merely instrumental, but as something autonomous and worthy of contemplative aesthetic interest. In short, *homo aestheticus* will recognize and respect aesthetic value, not as merely instrumental to economic or moral value, but as inherently and intrinsically foundational to human flourishing. In business, this recognition of and respect for the aesthetic can be nurtured through the provision of a structure that accommodates the aesthetic dimension.

## The Aesthetic Firm Structure

Much of the recent literature connecting aesthetics to business resorts, sooner or later, to the analogy of the theatre: "staging a performance"; "all the firm's a stage". The word "play" frequently appears, both as noun and verb: to stage a play; but also to play as in some spontaneous, indeterminate, no-fixed-rules, often-group-orientated, activity. Several authors emphasize the importance within the firm structure of an emotional *play-space*: a space, both physical and intellectual, in which managers have free rein to accommodate the aesthetic (non-teleological) dimension of their activity both in terms of creation and appreciation.

In their invocation of the *Experience Economy* (1999), Pine and Gimore claim that "work is theatre" (p. 101) and that managers must concern themselves with "staging business performances" (p. 108). Austin and Devin argue that the "activities of a wise manager…need not be much different to those of a theatre director" (2003, p. 162). In a recent memo to Starbucks' top managers, CEO Howard Schultz talks of the need to foster the "romance and theatre" of the Starbucks' "experience" (Birchall and Wiggins 2008, p. 7). In connecting business to aesthetics, both Chytry (2007) and Guillet de Monthoux (2004) refer to Schiller's famous dictum: "Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays" (1795/1967, p. 107). Thus, to paraphrase Shakespeare again: "The *play* is the thing".

Empirical grounding for these theatre and play analogies is supplied by Austin and Devin in their analysis of software development at Sun Microsystems. They observe the spontaneous nature of knowledge development in this activity: "The joy of working for the sake of doing the work, of work as play" (2003, p. 180). This *play-space* affords the development of the supra-rational knowledge necessary for the firm to flourish. The play-space conflates producer and consumer. Both derive aesthetic "goods" from the activity just as the artist creates simultaneously for herself and for some perceived future audience for the artwork.

Austin and Devin also emphasize the strong connection between an aesthetic theory of the firm and the increasingly *knowledge-based* modern economy: "As business becomes more dependent on knowledge to create value, work becomes more like art" (2003, p. 1). This need for an aesthetic play-space to nurture knowledge development is emphasized also by Nonaka, Toyama, and Nagata. In their paper, "A Firm as a Knowledge-creating Entity: A New Perspective on the Theory of the Firm" (2000), the authors invoke the Zen concept of "ba":

> Viewing a firm as a black box, a set of transactions or a collection of resources is not enough. 'Ba' (which roughly means 'place') is defined as a shared context in which knowledge is shared, created and utilized…'Ba' does not necessarily mean a physical space…[It] is an emerging relationship among individuals, and between an individual and the environment…[V]iewing a firm as a dynamic configuration of 'ba' means that we have to view the dynamic process in which the organizational members, their interactions and the firm itself evolves through continuous organizational knowledge creation. (2000, pp. 8–9)

Degot observes that this need for 'ba', for the emotional play-space, tends to work against larger, hierarchical corporate structures: "The creative manager must have sufficient leeway for expressing himself…creative management aspirations are most easily fulfilled within a smaller firm…" (1986, p. 23). This insight might, for example, explain the creations of YouTube and Facebook "without" Google and Microsoft. He concludes that "management, as it has evolved during the last one or two decades, now looks more like an artistic activity than the rationalistic model which business economists have been trying so long to impose" (p. 33).

> Chytry observes that the firm itself can be viewed as an "[o]rdering and shaping [of] the play-space" (2007, p. 41). If correctly ordered, the firm-as-play-space can encompass

> the artwork (as manifestation of the aesthetic dimension), the craftwork (as manifestation of the ethical dimension), and the commodity (as manifestation of the economic dimension). All three are intertwined, and the artwork – as originating 'spark' – "encompasses the entire range of human production and productivity" (*ibid.*).

Cummings emphasizes the non-teleological prerequisite for the firm-as-play-space: "The aesthetic approach would encourage organizations to base actions not on a series of ethical questions like: What is expected of us?; How can we conform?; and How do we act in accord?; but rather Who are we? And how/why are we different?" (2000, p. 166). Thus, far from a black-box or nexus-of-contracts view, he characterizes the firm along Foucaultian lines as an emerging art-form, a stylization, a personality. Heideggerian notions of "being in and through time" are invoked:

> While this [rationalist view] may seem to indicate that organizations are prisoners of their pasts, Heidegger's philosophy may enable strategists greater freedom. Recognizing that it is only our thrown-ness, our own historically shaped aesthetic view of the world, rather than any foundational basis, that directs our actions, enables questions to be asked about often unquestioned assumptions. We are encouraged to question the way in which historical events have thrown ourselves, and supposedly natural modes of being-in-the-world. [*Ibid.*]

An example of this type of "Heideggerian" firm structure being implemented in practice is supplied by the Finnish mobile phone manufacturer Nokia. Nokia was "thrown" from virtual bankruptcy in 1992, emerging as Europe's most valuable company in 2000. The new management team that took the helm in the early 1990s essentially re-created Nokia as a *play-space*. Apart from a general decision to focus on wireless telephones, management avoided corporate hierarchies or strategies. Every attempt was made to create an *art firm*: a firm that was open to creativity wherever it might lead. During this period, Roberts quotes one senior manager at Nokia saying; "We hate organization charts, and if forced to create one, we will *draw* it only in *pencil*" (2004, p. 30, emphasis added). In essence, Nokia's firm structure was characterized by a non-hierarchical ensemble-like flatness, openness, and a love of creativity. As Roberts observes; "No explicit incentives were needed to motivate managers…People were simply expected to do their best and were trusted to act in the best interests of the company" (pp. 172–173).

In summary, in an aesthetic theory of the firm, concepts surrounding artistic creation and appreciation relate to more than just the sculpture in the corporate lobby or the paintings mounted on office walls. The firm, in essence, *becomes* a *work* of art. More specifically, an aesthetic theory of the firm invokes a firm-structure that facilitates, or "stages", an ongoing and indeterminate process of cooperative human knowledge acquisition (both rational and emotional), intellectual/aesthetic development, and creativity. The firm becomes a play-space capable of nurturing *homo aestheticus*.

## Conclusion

In his widely acclaimed recent book *The Modern Firm*, Roberts describes firms as "institutions created to serve human needs" (2004, p. 20). He sees the challenge as "the incredibly difficult problem of coordinating and motivating large numbers of people carrying out a complex of interrelated activities often in different locations" (p. 1). To Roberts (an economist), the coordination problem is largely the province of agency theory: resolving the tension, the moral hazard, between the interests of the individual versus the interests of the firm. Indeed, Roberts's book largely can be summarized as a guide to resolving agency problems. The theory of the firm over the last 50 years, at least in economics, has been the theory of how to mitigate agency problems.

The *motivational* side of the challenge that Roberts identifies as central to the firm has received less attention to date. Human motivation in both the economics and business ethics literature has generally been accepted as individualistic, materialistic, and opportunistic. The "human needs" identified by Roberts as the motive behind the formation of firms are generally taken to be material needs: people are in business to make money.

What is becoming increasingly recognized, however, is that human motivation is both more complex and malleable than traditionally assumed. In many circumstances, the desire for status, social acceptance, sexual conquest, knowledge, beauty, etc., may trump any mundane desire for material gain. Humans may pursue several desires simultaneously, and they may not even be consciously aware of what is motivating them (Thaler 1992).

Given that firms are human constructs, it follows logically that any valid theory of the firm must accommodate this multiplicity of human motivations. Structures within the firm must be designed to nurture those motivations that further corporate objectives and must be designed to minimize the damaging effects of undesirable motivations. Hence, basic economic incentives for the individual—such as performance bonuses—must be structured in such a way as to further concomitantly the economic goals of the firm. A corporate code-of-ethics should motivate ethical behavior but not behavior that would lead to the significant destruction of corporate economic value.

This latter tension between the economic and moral role of the firm has led to the now vast literature in business ethics. In essence, in the context of theory of the firm, business ethics matters at the micro-level in the sense that an ethical agent will mitigate the agency costs of moral hazard by, say, not abusing trust. But business ethics also matters at the macro level in so far as the economic *raison d'etre* of the firm is only justifiable if it benefits society in aggregate. So the familiar economic dimension of the theory of the firm is impoverished without the inclusion of the ethical dimension.

This paper has focused on a third dimension of the theory of the firm, the aesthetic dimension. This aesthetic dimension too, can be viewed at a micro and macro level. At the micro level, it is another facet of human motivation—the desire for beauty, invoked here as *homo aestheticus*. At the macro level, by fostering the aesthetic dimension of corporate activity, the firm will ground its moral legitimacy by promoting human flourishing.

In summary, this paper has both a descriptive and prescriptive purpose. The descriptive purpose is to shed light on the increasingly aesthetic nature of human activity within firms. The prescriptive purpose is to suggest that fostering this aesthetic dimension will have morally desirable consequences.

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# Chapter 3
# The Impoverished Aesthetic of Modern Management: Beauty and Ethics in Organizations

**Steven S. Taylor**

**Abstract** Taking an embodied approach to ethics, I draw upon Brady's (1986. Aesthetic components of management ethics. *Academy of Management Review* 11/2: 337–344) idea that ethical action is largely determined by the prevailing aesthetics. I then trace the prevailing aesthetics of modern businesses from the aesthetics of craft, to a more impoverished aesthetics of efficiency, and finally to an even more impoverished aesthetics of ideas. A broader, fuller, richer aesthetic is better than a narrower, impoverished aesthetic—the richer aesthetic includes ethics, while the impoverished aesthetic does not.

**Keywords** Prevailing aesthetics • Craft • Efficiency • Ethical action

In honor of the tenth anniversary of the Enron scandal, Thomas Frank (2011) wrote:

> The collapse of the gas-and-power leviathan, then one of the largest companies in the nation, was the starting gun for the modern age of neoliberal scandal, the corporate crime that set the pattern. It was not the first episode to feature grotesque bonuses for insiders, or a fawning press, or bought politicians, or average people being fleeced by scheming predators. But it was the first in recent memory to bring together all of those elements in one glorious fireball of fraud. And in the years since, we've seen many more fireballs, each following the Enron pattern and all of them culminating in the financial meltdown of 2008, along with the seemingly unending recession it triggered. It is fair to say that in some genuine, dismaying sense, we are living in the Age of Enron. (p. 7)

Within academia, there has been no shortage of ways to try and make sense of this ongoing tide of corporate scandals. For example, if you tend to see things being determined by macro social forces, you can conceptualize organizational misconduct that is caused by a combination of pressure and opportunity (e.g. Baucus and Near 1991; Vaughn 1983). If your preference is for a more micro approach, you might focus on how the individuals involved cognitively normalize the misconduct

S.S. Taylor, Ph.D. (✉)
School of Business, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA, USA
e-mail: sst@wpi.edu

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(e.g. MacLean 2008). Because my preferred way of seeing the world is through the lens of organizational aesthetics (cf. Taylor and Hansen 2005), I will offer a different story of these corporate scandals.

Different stories allow us to see the world in different ways and open up different possibilities for action. My story is about the different criteria we use to make aesthetic judgments—in the simplest terms, why is one thing beautiful and another ugly?—and how these judgments relate to ethical behavior (and the lack thereof) in organizations. In Koehn & Elm's (introduction, this volume) terms, this chapter uses aesthetics in their fourth sense, which is the study of how human's are able to make judgments about aesthetic phenomena.

My story starts with an embodied approach to ethics and draws upon Brady's (1986) idea that ethical action is largely determined by the prevailing aesthetics. I trace the prevailing aesthetics of modern businesses through three phases, the aesthetics of craft, the aesthetics of efficiency, and finally the aesthetics of ideas. Then I critique the aesthetics of ideas and offer some implications and conclusions from taking this aesthetic perspective on business ethics.

## The Aesthetic Foundation of Ethical Action

Over the last 20 years, we have seen what Minahan and Cox call, *The Aesthetic Turn in Management* (2007). As part of that turn, Brady (1986) suggested that ethics could be extended from a cognitive "knowing that" to an aesthetic "knowing how". Brady makes a distinction between these two forms of knowing, linking "knowing how" to embodied, tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1958/1978) that cannot be explicitly expressed and suggesting that the explicit, cognitive "knowing that" knowledge is not sufficient for ethical practice—"knowing how" is required.

"Knowing how" and "Knowing that" are often not related. For example, I may "know that" a football will follow a ballistic trajectory when thrown and even be able to calculate the necessary force and angle of release to throw it to a precise spot on the field. However, knowing that doesn't mean I can throw the football to that spot. "Knowing how" means that I can throw the football to that spot, even though I don't know what a ballistic trajectory is. Brady's point is that the sort of cognitive ethical knowledge gained from studying utilitarian or deontological ethics does not necessarily translate into knowing how to act ethically.

Dobson (1999) carries this argument farther, suggesting that ethics that is not based in aesthetics is doomed to failure as aesthetics becomes more and more important in more and more aspects of modern organizations. Dobson describes an ethics that is based in aesthetics by drawing upon MacIntyre's (1981) conceptualization of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics has been picked up by a variety of business ethicists (e.g. Jackson 1996; Koehn 1995; Whetstone 2001), although it has been difficult to translate this idea into real "knowing how" (Hartman 2006).

From an aesthetic perspective, a virtue is an example of a specific "aesthetic". In this sense "aesthetic" refers to a criteria for judgment (Taylor and Hansen 2005;

Welsch 1997). We all have aesthetics that drive our decisions. I may love small, fast sports cars because my aesthetic criteria value a feel of oneness between horse and rider. You may love large trucks because your aesthetic criteria value utility and power. When I see a sports car, it is a thing of beauty to me. When you see a truck it is a thing of beauty to you. We all hold various sets of aesthetic criteria that we have developed over time and they play a critical role in determining how we act.

These aesthetic criteria are applied to our aesthetic experience of the world. This aesthetic knowledge comes from our direct sensing of the world as well as our empathy and intuition (Ramirez 2005). Although it is generally accepted in modern philosophy that "other forms of knowing such as those derived from rational thought depend on, and grow out of aesthetic experiences (Dewey 1958; quoted in Gagliardi 1996, p. 1213)", it is important to recognize that much of modern management and economic thinking is based in a paradigm that privileges cognitive thought and approaches. It is a paradigm that goes back to the dawn of the enlightenment and Descartes' dictum "*cogito ergo sum*." This modernist focus on logical, intellectual thinking separates mind and body and declares knowledge to consist of cognitions. Recent work in neuroscience (e.g. Damasio 1994; LeDoux 1996) supports the idea that by and large we make judgments based upon our felt aesthetic experience of the world rather than a cognitive assessment.

In short, we do not act based on an intellectual, cognitive calculation of right or wrong, but rather an impulse to seek the beautiful and avoid the ugly (Brady 1986)—however our personal aesthetic judges beauty and ugliness. Of course, from time to time we may overcome our felt sense and reflect-in-action (Schön 1983) enough to allow our cognitive sense of right and wrong to guide our actions, but that is the exception in human behavior rather than the norm. When we do make ethical decisions deliberatively, Zhong's (2011) work suggests those decisions are less ethical than those made in an embodied way, based upon our felt sense of the situation. Brady sums it up by saying "ethics is fundamentally aesthetic, and the categories of right and wrong ultimately are reduced to the beautiful and ugly (1986, p. 340)". Of course, reducing it to just the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the ugly is far too simple as we also may have an attraction to the sublime, the comic, and a variety of other aesthetic categories as well as a repulsion to the grotesque and the disgusting—perhaps even some at the same time. But for the purposes of not making the argument overly complex, I will focus on the beautiful and the aesthetic criteria for beauty in organizations.

## The Evolution of the Organizational Aesthetic

What constitutes the beautiful has long been and probably always will be a question of philosophic debate (Hanfling 1992). As a general topic of philosophic discussion, however, beauty fell out of fashion in the twentieth century (Steiner 2001), although it has recently been making something of a comeback (e.g. Beckley and Shapiro 1998). There has been a stream of scientific research (e.g. Etcoff 1999) which posits that beauty offers advantages as diverse as getting mates more easily and getting lighter jail sentences. And although most organizational reality may be characterized by "an absence of beauty" (Ottensmeyer 1996, p. 189), a few organizational researchers have broached the subject of beauty within organizations (Dean et al. 1997; Guillen 1997; Guillet de Monthoux and Statler 2008; Ladkin 2008; Ramirez 1991; White 1996) largely focusing on the question of defining what constitutes beauty in organizations.

Ladkin (2008) draws upon Plato and Plotinus to create a conception of beautiful leadership as being based in mastery, congruence, and purpose. (Guillet de Monthoux 2004; Guillet de Monthoux and Statler 2008) suggests that we turn to Schiller's conception of beauty. Schiller (1795/2004) posited that people have a material drive (*Stofftrieb*) which seeks physical reality through our senses, a formal drive (*Formtrieb*) which seeks a formal representation of reality through our intellect, and an aesthetic play drive (*Spieltrieb*) which mediates between the material and formal drives. Schiller defines beauty as achieving unity between the material reality and the formal representation. In Schiller's aesthetic play, it is a movement of both the formal representation towards the material reality and the material reality towards the formal representation—it is a balancing and working of the tension between the formal and the material in both directions in the process of artistic creation and appreciation. It is this play between the formal representation and the material reality; this trying to achieve a perfection that matches what is possible that is the drive towards beauty. These are rather abstract concepts, which should become clearer later on when I bring in some concrete examples.

All of this work attempts to define universal criteria for beauty within organizations. However, beauty is defined differently by different cultures and even the word for beauty means different things. In English, *beauty* is the object of longing, in Sanskrit *sundara* is holiness, while in Japanese *wabi-sabi* is humility and imperfection (Sartwell 2006). This implies that what constitutes beauty may well be different in different organizations or that what constitutes beauty might change over time as organizational cultures change. I believe that the criteria for beauty in business organizations have changed over the last 200 years in an important ways from an aesthetics of craft to an aesthetics of efficiency to an aesthetics of ideas.

## The Aesthetics of Craft

My story starts with an aesthetic of work that is based in craft. Craft's role in business goes back to the guilds of the middle ages and beyond (Sennett 2008). Those who made goods for the rest of society, from glass blowers to blacksmiths were dedicated to their craft and were driven by an aesthetic ideal of beauty that was based in, what for lack of a better term, I shall call quality. Quality in craft is achieved through exceptional craft skill. For aficionados of the particular craft, exceptional craft skill is experienced as beauty (Taylor 2011). An expert wood worker appreciates and experiences beauty in the exceptional craft skill required to create an intricate dovetail joint in a way that the lay person does not. A brass player may find a tripled tongued run that flows into a doit (an upward glissando) beautiful in a way that the casual listener does not.

This aesthetic of quality and exceptional craft skill resonates with several conceptions of beauty. Aristotle's (1999) idea of beauty as being based in the perfection of form fits nicely with the pursuit of craft skills for their own sake. As the actor continues to take master classes throughout their career, they are trying to perfect their own craft, to perfect the form of what they do. This sense of form as being about process and what we do rather than just the end result of what we do is important in the world of craft. As a student learning theatrical directing I was constantly told that the process is the product—the form of your rehearsal process determines the form of the performance. Ladkin's (2008) idea of beautiful leadership being based in mastery, congruence, and purpose is drawn directly from the craft mastery (one might say artistry) of the singer Bobby McFerrin. Craft always seeks congruence and has clear purpose (one of the ways that it is often differentiated from art). That purpose is connected to the end user. The traditional glass blower wanted to create a jug that will work for the user. The wood worker wanted to create a table that would serve its owner well. Thus a critical part of the ethos of craft is care for the end user (Taylor et al. 2011).

Within the craft process we can see something of Schiller's (1795/2004) conception of beauty as aesthetic play with tension between the formal and material drives. Crawford (2009) argues that at the heart of a craft process is the tension that comes from working with limits not of your own making:

> One can't be a musician without learning to play a particular instrument, subjecting one's fingers to the discipline of frets or keys. The musician's power of expression is founded upon a prior obedience; her musical agency is built up from an ongoing submission. To what? To her teacher, perhaps, but this is incidental rather than primary—there is such a thing as the self-taught musician. Her obedience rather is to the mechanical realities of her instrument, which in turn answer to certain natural necessities of music that can be expressed mathematically. For example, halving a length of string under a given tension raises its pitch by an octave. These facts do not arise from the human will, and there is no altering them. I believe the example of the musician sheds light on the basic character of human agency, namely, that it arises only within concrete limits that are not of our making. (p. 53)

The limits not of our making are the material reality, while our desires to shape that material reality in some way is Schiller's formal drive. For Schiller, the potential for beauty is not so much in the union of these two drives, but in the play between them. This suggests that beauty is in the craft process rather than in the end results of that process.

The overall aesthetic of the craft process is complex, one that holds tensions rather than resolving them. This aesthetic focuses the practitioner of the craft on the process rather than the outcome and on the end user rather than on the self. It is an aesthetic that can be pursued, but never quite obtained—there is always more quality, the craft is never perfected.

The experience of exceptional craft skill as beauty has not completely left modern organizations. It is still found where ever craft skills are used. Certainly it is found in places like model shops and design studios, but I think it is more pervasive than that. I believe it still exists where the idea of beauty as efficiency has not taken hold, namely the more informal aspects of organization. When a skilled manager executes a brilliant political move, other skilled managers may experience it as beautiful. When a skilled office wit, makes an astute comment that cuts another down to size, other wits may experience it as beautiful. This is what White (1996) means when he invokes the phrase, "it's working beautifully."

## The Aesthetics of Efficiency

The industrial revolution replaced craft approaches with industrial approaches—skilled craft masters with assembly lines and humans with machines. At the start of the twentieth century, Taylor's Scientific Management continued the elimination of craft as process after process was engineered and optimized. The aesthetics of efficiency was born.

Guillen (1997) shows how the desire for efficiency became a dominant aesthetic in the twentieth century and beauty became equated with efficiency. Guillen traces how European modernist architecture was influenced by Scientific Management which in turn became pervasive in modern western life over the course of the twentieth century. Everywhere the aesthetics of efficiency was embodied in the buildings and in turn it became even more embedded within the businesses within those buildings.

The aesthetics of efficiency still had the tension of working with limits not of your own making. However, the ideals or formal goals were greatly simplified. The complex and somewhat ambiguous ideal of quality was replaced with a clearly quantifiable ideal of efficiency. The focus shifted from being on both the end user and the process for its own sake to being on the process in a very particular way and on the cost of the end product. The complex aesthetic play that was the basis of the craft aesthetic was reduced to a narrow focus on quantifiable cost and the drive to maximize the efficiency of production.

This move from the craft aesthetic to the efficiency aesthetic is not just a change from one set of criteria to another, but more importantly is a change from a rich, complex aesthetic to an impoverished, simplistic aesthetic. The drive for efficiency does not allow for Schiller's aesthetic play between formal representation and material reality because it constricts both to what is directly quantifiable as costs. In the drive for efficiency, the rich craft construct of quality is reduced to the never ending drive to reduce the variance in processes which is embedded in the six sigma culture of modern business.

The aesthetic of efficiency works to preclude ethics from decision making. In a classic case of unethical corporate behavior, Gioia (1992) offers a first person account of how the aesthetics of efficiency drove the Ford Motor Company to not initiate recalls in the now infamous Pinto fire case. Gioia frames it in terms of script schemas that guided cognition and precluded the inclusion of ethics in the decision making. I suggest this is how the aesthetics of efficiency plays out in organizations. Only the aspects of the situation that can be quantified in terms of cost and can thus be assessed in terms of efficiency are included. In the Ford case, the expected cost benefits of saving the human lives that were likely to be lost in gas tank explosions was less than the cost of recalling the cars and fixing the gas tank flaw—the efficient answer was to not recall the Pintos.

I don't know of anyone who claims the decision was beautiful. But there is a certain elegance in the mathematical calculations of the cost benefit analysis that simplifies the complex question of what to do about a known design flaw down to numbers:

> Costs: $137 000 000
> (Estimated as the costs of a production fix to all similarly designed cars and trucks with the gas tank aft of the axle (12 500 000 vehicles × $11/vehicle))
>
> Benefits: $49 530 000
> (Estimated as the savings from preventing (180 projected deaths × $200 000/death) + (180 projected burn injuries × $67 000/injury) + (2100 burned cars × $700/car) (Gioia 1992, p. 381)

The criteria for judgment—namely the aesthetics of efficiency—makes the choice clear, the costs far outweigh the benefits. Although, it may be impossible to see beauty in a decision to let people burn alive rather than recall the Pintos, the abstract idea that we can reduce complex issues to simple calculations based in an all-encompassing criteria of economic efficiency has a visceral appeal for some—myself included. I love the clarity and certainty of the formulas and calculations in the same way that I love great examples of modernist architecture—both are beautiful in their cool efficiency.

## The Aesthetics of Ideas

Just as the aesthetics of craft were largely supplanted by the aesthetics of efficiency, toward the end of the twentieth century the aesthetics of efficiency was supplanted by the aesthetics of ideas. Nobel laureate Paul Krugman describes what happened this way:

> As I see it, the economics profession went astray because economists, as a group, mistook beauty, clad in impressive-looking mathematics, for truth. Until the Great Depression, most economists clung to a vision of capitalism as a perfect or nearly perfect system. That vision wasn't sustainable in the face of mass unemployment, but as memories of the Depression faded, economists fell back in love with the old, idealized vision of an economy in which rational individuals interact in perfect markets, this time gussied up with fancy equations. The renewed romance with the idealized market was, to be sure, partly a response to shifting political winds, partly a response to financial incentives. But while sabbaticals at the Hoover Institution and job opportunities on Wall Street are nothing to sneeze at, the central cause of the profession's failure was the desire for an all-encompassing, intellectually elegant approach that also gave economists a chance to show off their mathematical prowess. (Krugman 2009)

If we take Krugman's argument at face value, it shows a world—and bear in mind that the world of business and modern management theory and practice is largely grounded in the world of economics—where the attraction to beauty and elegance is very powerful. But the people within that world do not recognize it as beauty, ostensibly because beauty has no place within the hard science world of economics. Krugman takes as obvious that the ideas are beautiful to the economists and that they are driven by that beauty.

The same thing has happened in the world of business, with the world of financial services leading the way. Equating beauty with ideas impoverished the aesthetic even further. With efficiency there was still a connection to the physical world and Schiller's material drive. As the aesthetic becomes completely about the idea, about Schiller's formal drive, we lose touch not only with the material drive, but also with the aesthetic play between the material and formal drives. In Schiller's sense we lose the very possibility of real beauty because real beauty exists within the aesthetic play between the material and formal drives.

I can understand the attraction to the beauty of ideas. It offers us a way to transcend the limits of the material world, those limits not of our own making. The idea of the perfect, unregulated market that allocates resources and determines prices with perfect efficiency is beautiful. It doesn't exist in the world in which we live in, but it is a beautiful idea. The idea of a corporation that makes consistent, large profits quarter after quarter is lovely. The idea of a business that is so well managed that it hits its target numbers quarter after quarter is beautiful. As business and modern management education has moved from being dominated by a focus on the management of production processes and people to a focus on the financial management, consistent economic return is the perfect form that management theory aspires to achieve. The greater that level of return the more beautiful it is. This aesthetic and its attraction is well known in the financial world:

> Beware the "beautiful" line. Business is choppy by nature; some years are great, others are terrible, through no fault of management. Although it's natural to be attracted to companies whose earnings rise in what I called a beautiful line—increasing by, say, 10% year after year—you should be skeptical of such outstanding performance; it could be a sign of cooking the books. (Glassman 2005, p. 32)

In the years leading up to its collapse, Enron was the most beautiful company in the world. Wall Street analysts, the business press, and business school academics fawned over their consistent returns and growth. Enron CFO Andrew Fastow pursued the goal of consistent financial returns with a single minded passion (cf. McLean and Elkind 2003). The fraud he perpetuated consisted largely of making the quarterly numbers look "good" by moving losses to "special purpose entities" that were not included in the quarterly financial statements. He was hiding the real picture of how the company was performing and presenting a beautiful fake picture in its place. Fastow claimed that he had not violated any of the rules of accounting. At some technical level that may well have been true. But he was violating the underlying, guiding principle of the *craft* of accounting, which a basic textbook describes in the following way: "The art of accounting and finance is the art of using limited data to come as close as possible to an accurate description of how well a company is performing." (Berman et al. 2008, pp. 4–5)

This idea of coming as close as possible to presenting an accurate description is a craft aesthetic. It recognizes that there are limits not of your own making that we can probably never claim to have perfectly represented how well the company is doing, but as accountants we are committed to constantly trying. It captures a sense of quality that is complex, holds tensions and paradox, and when done masterfully can be beautiful. Perhaps more importantly for the argument here, it inherently promotes an ethical standard within the aesthetic. It is a commitment to a higher truth that is outside of the individual's or even the organization's interests. It is a commitment to the craft of accounting for its own sake. It is a commitment to, in Schiller's terms, the aesthetic play of trying to make the formal representation match the material reality, with the knowledge that the two may only come together in fleeting moments of beauty.

This aesthetic that is obsessed with numbers which weren't necessarily representative of real performance ran deep within Enron. For example there is the story that "a trader covering the South West was buying and selling the same lit bandwidth in Florida with the same counterpart on a daily basis. Clearly, both had an incentive to show that their volumes were increasing." (Paleologo 2011) The trader was trying to create the beautiful numbers that management wanted and the reality that there wasn't an actual secondary market in bandwidth in which to trade didn't matter. It was the numbers, not the reality that mattered. It was the beauty of the idea that drove the unethical behavior.

## A Critique of the Aesthetic of Ideas

The movement from an aesthetic of craft to an aesthetic of efficiency is a movement to a more impoverished aesthetic. The continued movement to an aesthetic of ideas moves to an even more impoverished aesthetic. But it is worse than that, because the ideas of modern management theory are *kitsch* (Linstead 2002).

Kitsch involves the easy satisfaction of expectations, the harmonic fusion of the image with reality itself and the elision of tensions without placing demands on its audience. It takes the disturbing and makes it comforting. (Linstead 2002, p. 660)

The problem with kitsch is that it comes between us and a complex reality and we then mistake the kitsch for reality—much like Krugman's economists mistake their theories for truth. Coming back to Schiller, if kitsch eliminates the tension between the image (formal representation or *Formtrieb*) and reality (*Stofftrieb*), there is no possibility of aesthetic play between the two (*Spieltrieb*) and thus no possibility of beauty. Thus if we take seriously Linstead's (2002) argument that modern management theory is kitsch, we see that modern management is working within the impoverished aesthetic of kitsch ideas where real beauty is not possible.

Linstead (2002) offers a detailed analysis of Maslow's needs-based motivation work and Peters and Waterman's Excellence work showing how both are kitsch.

Organizations are filled with management ideas such as net present value calculations and five forces analysis that turn what should be complex tension-filled, seemingly paradoxical issues (which good art engages with on a routine basis) into straightforward, quantitative calculations. They make what *should* be disturbing (I mean disturbing in a good way, in a way that provokes soul searching and passionate discussion) into something that is strangely comforting.

I certainly appreciate that to an investor, consistent returns quarter after quarter are a beautiful thing. The attraction to a high rate of return that seems to have no risk is clearly a visceral, felt experience. That our intellect tells us it is too good to be true doesn't make it any less attractive or any less beautiful. However, it is not real beauty, it is kitsch—it is an image that has simplified the play between the ideal and material world into a single, comfortable, unproblematic thing.

## Conclusion

Looking at corporate corruption and unethical behavior through an aesthetic lens allows me to tell a different story. At the heart of the story is the idea that a broader, fuller, richer aesthetic is better than a narrower, impoverished aesthetic. To say it simply, the richer aesthetic includes ethics, while the impoverished aesthetic does not. By richer, I mean that the aesthetic holds contradictions and competing values, which are resolved in an embodied "knowing how" (Brady 1986), whilst the impoverished aesthetic is based in an intellectual "knowing that" (Brady 1986) which makes judgments by reducing the range of phenomena that are considered. That is not to say that it is bad to see beauty in efficiency or fall in love with the elegance of ideas. It is to say that it problematic to limit your aesthetic to efficiency or ideas. A craft aesthetic can find beauty in efficiency, while at the same time holding the tension between efficiency and quality. A craft aesthetic can love ideas while also working with limits that show the limits of those ideas.

The aesthetic lens allows us to step back and look at the taken-for-granted, largely tacit assumptions about our world that guide our judgment. It allows us to move beyond a strictly instrumental view of the world that conceptualizes unethical behavior in terms of opportunities and pressures. It moves beyond seeing humans in terms of cognitive machines. It moves to seeing humans as embodied beings driven by aesthetic judgments. Then within those judgments, humans cognitively justify their behavior perhaps even in response to pressures and opportunities. In this sense, the aesthetic lens allows us to move beyond conflicting frames (Schön and Rein 1994) to the look at the judgments that support the frames.

I have argued that unethical action in organizations is based in an impoverished aesthetic that sees beauty in kitschy management ideas. These conceptions provide an overly simplistic and comforting sense of organizations, which leads us away from the complex aesthetics that would provide a sounder base for ethical action. In our attempts to produce generalizable management knowledge that is "scientific"

(Mintzberg 2005, 2009), we have created this aesthetic of ideas in large part through the discourse of modern management research and education.

The aesthetic of ideas is also enabled by the rise of investor capitalism in which short-term financial results are fetishized and organizational leaders are judged and rewarded based upon quarterly numbers and stock performance. There is an implicit management (or perhaps financial is a better term) theory that quarterly numbers and stock prices accurately represent the complex performance of an organization. It is pure kitsch—comforting, simple and if my argument is at all true, dangerous. It is one thing for collectors of kitsch to fill their homes with cute doo-dads made in China. It is another for Wall Street financial analysts to collect organizational kitsch and invest the fortunes that are meant to be a generation's retirement funds based on that kitsch.

However, it is the way that this obsession with the appearance of financial numbers affects behavior within organizations that is most troubling. Driven by the kitsch beauty of perfect financial numbers, managers lose touch with a craft aesthetic—if indeed they ever had one. If they have an MBA, they have learned this aesthetic of ideas, one case at a time. They have not learned a craft aesthetic; they have not learned an embodied sense of seeking quality for its own sake in an ongoing process of working with limits not of their own making.

If we are to have businesses that embody ethical practice rather than corporate corruption, then we must build a stronger, more robust aesthetic. We must move beyond kitschy ideas such as, "the corporation's primary responsibility is to increase shareholder value." I have offered a craft aesthetic as an example, but it is by no means the only choice. Organizations need to embrace more robust aesthetics such as doing something that has value in the world (Collins 2001; Collins and Porras 1994). The concept of Triple Bottom Line accounting could also be the basis of a complex and robust aesthetic, especially if it were treated as aesthetic criteria for judgment that is meant to be internalized and embodied rather than as another intellectual tool that allows organizational performance to be quantified and analyzed. These aesthetics are complex and hold paradox and tensions that are not easily resolved through rational analysis, but can be resolved with embodied engagement—these aesthetics are held deeply, in an embodied way, felt as beautiful, and guide us to more ethical action.

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# Chapter 4
# Literature and the Canonical Values of Capitalism

**Christopher M. Michaelson**

**Abstract** The canonical texts of capitalism come from political theory, military theory, biology, and, of course, economics. A canon signifies and shapes human values and practices, but notably, the capitalist canon is not typically perceived to include works of the arts and humanities. This paper explores how attention to aesthetic values in the canon, particular through works of narrative literature, might influence ethical practices of capitalism.

**Keywords** Literature • Canon • Capitalism • Ayn Rand • Mary Wolstonecraft-Shelley

Imagine there existed somewhere a compendium of texts that, in the collective judgment of the stakeholders of capitalism, represented its core values and practices at that place and time. What would belong in that compendium, which we might call the canon of capitalism? The answer would depend in part on whom you asked in this imaginary great conversation. To be sure, experts' or leaders' list would be influenced by their disciplinary training, their cultural origins, their temporal era, and, to a certain extent, their personal tastes and biases. Further, we might ask whether the conversation should be restricted to the powerful leaders of capitalism or whether it should include the relatively powerless who have had, for good or ill, little influence over the economic system that influences their lives. There might be stable agreement about some texts and significant divergence regarding others at the periphery of the canon. While many or perhaps most experts and leaders were debating about economics and politics, many others would locate their most important and fundamental understanding of capitalist values in a story, a work of narrative literature. Eventually, the great conversation across disciplines would focus on such stories, where all participants would share some experience and connection. Given the

C.M. Michaelson, Ph.D. (✉)
Department of Ethics and Business Law, Opus College of Business,
University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN, USA
e-mail: cmmichaelson@stthomas.edu

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special ability of stories to appeal to our emotions while also demanding our rational faculties, the stories of the capitalist canon might excite particular controversy while also generating fertile dialogue about the way things are and ought to be.

## American Capitalists' Favorite Book

Perhaps, without us even being aware of it, this conversation is happening all the time in the background of practice: an implicit debate, often grounded in texts, about what the core practices of capitalism are and what its values should be. As a case in point, even amid the gradual decline of American economic hegemony in the post-recession, early twenty-first century, arguably the most influential capitalist theorist in the hearts of American financial institution executives fighting to maintain their economic advantage was Ayn Rand. Leaders enamored of Rand included the former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan who over the turn of the century presided over nearly two decades of apparent economic prosperity. This prosperity consisted of several economic bubbles, which were burst first by terrorism and then by an asset price collapse that not only undermined global economic confidence but also Greenspan's historic legacy. Greenspan knew Rand personally; he credited her with teaching him how to connect empirical economic observations to normative human values while he also taught her about economics (Burns 2009, p. 150). Though his "fervor receded", he admitted to having been "intellectually limited" before meeting her (Greenspan 2007, p. 52).

Another Rand enthusiast was Howard Lutnick, the chairman and chief executive of Cantor Fitzgerald. This bond brokerage firm lost nearly two-thirds of its employees at the top of World Trade Center One in the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001 (Knox 2001). In its miraculous survival, the firm became the iconic representative of much that anti-capitalist terrorists had sought to destroy (Blake 2009). Searching for a father figure after losing both parents as a young man, Lutnick became Bernie Cantor's protégé and subsequently Cantor's president at age 29 (Barbash 2003). Perhaps Rand's advocacy of individualism was manifest in a dispute between Howard and Bernie's wife Iris over control over the firm that occurred while Bernie lay on his deathbed. Howard eventually won control of the firm, but Iris had him barred from Bernie's funeral (Willoughby 1996).

The most vocal Rand revivalist was John Allison, the former chairman and chief executive of BB&T who grew it into one of the United States' largest banks. He was a strident opponent of the government's bank bailout plan during the 2008–2009 recession. Allison claimed adherence to Rand's beliefs "in total" (Parnell and Dent 2009, p. 590). Under Allison's leadership, directors and executives were given books to read that aligned with Allison's values-driven approach. The framework for the BB&T values statement was developed in line with Rand's philosophy, and outside the company, BB&T's foundation donated funds to academic institutions to promote the study of Ayn Rand's philosophy. In retirement, Allison continued speaking publicly about, and giving money to further the cause of, his favorite author (Martin 2009; Parnell and Dent 2009).

After the corporate scandals of 2001–2002, interest in Rand spiked among corporate executives who sought to reassure themselves and remind others that individualism was not such a bad thing and that they remained the "producers of society" (Jones 2002). The recession of 2008–2009 and associated government intervention in the free market did even more to incite Rand's followers to renewed faith (Guthrie 2009), leading to sales in "record numbers" (Ayn Rand Institute 2009a). Indeed, Rand's (1957/1992) free market ideals—the context for which was disenchantment with the Soviet planned economy and, as part of that rejection, a zealous embrace of the perceived individual freedoms of American capitalism—have influenced business practice and its supporting cultural context. In this regard, it might be accurate to say that Rand's ideology, the most complete expression of which is set out in her 1957 novel *Atlas Shrugged* is canonical to capitalism.

However, the prospect of *Atlas Shrugged* belonging in the capitalist canon concerns me for at least two reasons. First, the content of the book seems to have lost its relevance as we live through an historic rebalancing of market power. Mired in the bipolar worldview of the Cold War, its story seems to represent government and business as mutually exclusive actors, as though for one to succeed, the other must fail or withdraw. Such terms of debate might have resonated when the main debate was between communism and capitalism. Today, they oversimplify our present and future world in which business actors acknowledge and even embrace a political role, at times collaborating or at least negotiating with government actors (see, for example, Scherer et al. 2009; Schwab 2008). A second concern about the canonical status of *Atlas Shrugged* is that, whatever its merits—and its supporters celebrate many—it is a bad book, "a literary disaster" as I termed it in my evaluation of the undergraduate course in which I first read it. Putting the subjective appraisal of a naïve undergraduate aside, from its first reviewers to contemporary critics, *Atlas Shrugged* has not been admired for its aesthetic qualities by scarcely anyone save its ideological supporters. To be fit for a canon, a book ought at the very least to be uncontroversially good, or, since that term itself is controversial in critical parlance, worthy of aesthetic attention. Which brings us to potentially a third concern: the place of aesthetic objects, narrative literature in particular, in a canon having to do with the values and practices of capitalism. In general, how might aesthetic values, as expressed in literary texts, influence the ethical practices of capitalism?

## The Capitalist Canon and Literature

A canon—a term used in religion, music, and other disciplines to denote a fairly stable though ever-evolving receptacle of ideas, themes, texts, and figures that are fundamental to a culture or composition—has both descriptive and normative roles. Descriptively, the capitalist canon of the twentieth century reflects a complex mixture of colonialist traces, post-Cold War globalization, Western-developed market norms, and growing emerging market influences. Normatively, answering what we want the canon to be and what we do not want it to be enables us to articulate the values we desire in an emerging global capitalism. A capitalist canon can function as a common currency of ethical and economic values, to signify historical practice, and to shape future practice (Michaelson 2012).

At a "Reading Leaders' Minds" session at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2010 in Davos,[1] panelists cited four "classics of business literature": Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, and Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. It is likely that these classics appear impressively on executive bookshelves more often than they are dusted off to be read, but their attendant "macho myths and metaphors" (like those discussed years earlier in Solomon 1993, describing an earlier era of scandals and prophesying future ones to come) have the potential to shape our understanding of what capitalism means (cutthroat power relations in a construct of business-as-war) and how it must be practiced (with deference to the invisible hand as the agent of natural selection). Moreover, the Forum panelists claimed, the literature they read in their youths shaped the character and decisions of the professionals they would become (World Economic Forum 2010). That is to say, the literature that business leaders read might constitute as important an expression as science and economics of the moral values that influence capitalist behaviors, for good or ill.

Belief in the value of stories to culture and character formation is old and ubiquitous. For example, in China, a poetic oral tradition among common folk contributed to the anointment of poetry by the ancient Chinese literati as one of the proper occupations of the scholar (Hinton 2008), a veritable "national religion…to inform and explain the way Chinese people think" (World Economic Forum 2009). In the Confucian tradition, a primary purpose of education is character-building (Tu 2010), and the means by which such moral self-cultivation occurs is through humanistic study (Ivanhoe 2000). In Western philosophy, the importance of narrative storytelling in a canonical receptacle of cultural values has been recognized since the ancient quarrel between Plato, who famously banished the poets from his republic, and Aristotle, who welcomed them (Nussbaum 1990). Plato was wary of poetry for the same reason Aristotle embraced it, namely, its ability to connect to our emotions. For Plato, dramatic emotions were a slippery slope toward a form of intoxication (see *Ion* and *Republic*, especially Book X; see also Murdoch 1977; Belfiore 1984), whereas for Aristotle they were a path to imagining "things as such might happen" (*De Poetica* 1451b as translated in Nussbaum 1990) and to cultivating empathy (Nussbaum 2001). Business scholars have increasingly promoted the potential contribution of the arts and humanities to organization studies (Phillips 1995) management education (Adler 2006; Gagliardi and Czarniawska 2006; Starkey and Tempest 2009), and to the formation of ethical values in business (Donaldson and Freeman 1994; Koehn 2010; Michaelson 2005). As with the Davos panelists, literature provides a path to explore what we value that cannot be expressed in purely economic and social scientific forms.

[1] In the time period around and including the World Economic Forum panels referenced in this paper, the author was an ad hoc advisor to the Forum's Arts and Culture Programme, an informal role which included providing advice, recommendations, and feedback on the referenced panels.

*Atlas Shrugged* is just one of many works of literature that might comprise a future capitalist canon. Any business stakeholder is likely to have a different answer to the question of what comprises the canon, and those answers are likely to reflect each individual's or group's education, culture, and idiosyncrasies. Unlike a religious canon, or the canonical form of music, there is no keeper of the capitalist canon except for the evolving dialogue about what that implicit canon might be. Accordingly, it is worth exploring descriptively what works *do* shape the values of business leaders, especially as changing economic power entails changing cultural power. While the capitalist canon is multidisciplinary, in this paper I focus particularly on two candidates from narrative literature because of the essential role that stories play in reflecting and shaping our values and practices. In light of Elm and Koehn's introduction to his volume, one sense of the aesthetic that interests me concerns the power of particular works of art (in the case of this chapter, works of narrative literature) to illuminate other features of ethical life. However, not *any* works of art are fit for this moral function. I am also concerned with how a well-formed aesthetic sensibility that attends to the aesthetic quality (and qualities) of artworks can cultivate a better sense of how to live. As I will argue in the next thread of the great conversation about the capitalist canon, the mistaken aesthetic judgment that *Atlas Shrugged* warrants attention as a work of art serves to rationalize the promulgation of her ethically specious sociopolitical ideology.

## *Atlas Shrugged* and the Capitalist Canon

Rand's reputation among many business leaders for her ideological views and literary achievements reinforces and challenges the goals of this paper. On one hand, *Atlas Shrugged* might be an exemplar for how literature can shape capitalist values and practices. Allison, in particular, was convinced that Rand's professed adherence to Aristotelian rationality provided a foundation for reasonable decisions he made while leading BB&T and, moreover, for management principles that permeated the organization, in no small part because of his dissemination of *Atlas Shrugged*.

Allison supported his own and his company's advocacy of Rand on economic and ethical grounds, claiming that his financial success at BB&T was a product of Randian "core values…embraced at the management level" associated with "a very high level of integrity" (Parnell and Dent 2009, p. 588). In fact, BB&T performed relatively well during and after the 2008–2009 recession, guided by investment principles that Allison attributed to Rand. As early as 2006, BB&T demonstrated its willingness to defy standard practice by refusing, as a self-declared "matter of principle" regarding Rand-like individual property rights, to loan money to developers who acquired land seized by governments invoking eminent domain (Ward 2006). Some of the lending practices, such as negative amortization mortgages, that were a central force in other banks' and homeowners' troubles leading to the recession, were rejected by BB&T on rationalist principles that Allison attributed to Rand (Parnell and Dent 2009). Subsequently, Allison's opposition to government intervention in the market led him to use his company's repayment to the United States Treasury of Trouble Asset Relief Program publicly to express his Randian opposition to government interference in the market (Martin 2009).

Allison's study of Rand goes beyond *Atlas Shrugged* to her other fiction and non-fiction, but the ideas that Allison credits with guiding his own values and practices are traceable to the narrative of *Atlas Shrugged*. The novel is set at an unspecified time in a languishing United States that has lost its economic motor. Its leaders—not the government figureheads and bureaucrats that Rand mocks, but rather the captains of industry and creativity whom she celebrates in this and other works—have gone on "strike", hiding out until circumstances get bad enough to demonstrate how underappreciated they have been. The virtues that Allison extolled included enlightened self-interest, which in the novel, in contrast to unenlightened self-interest, leads great industrialists to share their inventions with society while restraining them from giving their wisdom away without fair compensation and recognition. They also included rationality, exemplified by Rand's insistence upon Aristotelian logic (and her associated insistence that her philosophy of Objectivism deployed such logic), as evidenced by the titles of the three main sections of the novel: "Non-Contradiction", "Either-Or", and "A is A". Implicitly, this combination of enlightened self-interest and rationality leads Rand to the familiar conclusion that government activity often impedes free market enterprise and the associated productivity and innovation entailed by the exercise of rational self-interest. The plot reaches its climax, and also its critical albatross, with the 3-h (60-odd-page) speech of John Galt, the organizer of the strike, who declares "We are on strike against the creed of unearned rewards and unrewarded duties" (937), concluding, "I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine" (993).

To the extent that Allison's and BB&T's values and practices were genuinely derived from *Atlas Shrugged* as a source of values signification and model of practice, the book seems a worthy example of how aesthetic values, as expressed in literary texts, can descriptively influence the ethical practices of capitalism. However, there remain normative issues of aesthetics and ethics that challenge the project of drawing on literature to shape future capitalist values and practices. Notwithstanding Allison's ethical admiration for Rand's profession of selfishness as a virtue, ideological critics of *Atlas Shrugged* have been more likely to blame selfishness as a primary cause of the recession than to suggest it as the savior. Meanwhile, literary critics have questioned the book's relevance, logical coherence, and aesthetic merits to our ethical and thus, economic needs.

If *Atlas Shrugged* epitomized the alleged virtues of American capitalism against Soviet communism, its relevance, to a global economy comprised of varying degrees of free market capitalism and state capitalism and clan capitalism, is questionable. Its hypnotic power on its devotees comes from its remarkable simplicity (or, to its detractors, simplistic remarks). In 1,000-plus pages, Rand' expresses sustained hostility toward government intervention in the free market and conveys her veneration of the capitalist titans who purport to carry the weight and run "the motor of the world". As much as Rand blamed centralized planning for the poverty she endured as a child in the Soviet Union (Burns 2009), the simple dichotomy she posed between the hand of government and the invisible hand is perhaps no longer adequate to the task of understanding and anticipating the future trajectory of a global economy, which will soon be headlined by a managed-capitalist Chinese economy that is neither purely centralized nor decentralized, capitalist nor communist (Jacques 2009; Redding and Witt 2007). To see the global economy in 2010 as bipolar is to be exiled to a bygone world—a sensation one also feels reading the preface of Milton Friedman's 40th anniversary preface to *Capitalism and Freedom*, in which he distinguishes between "two alternative ways of organizing an economy: top-down and bottom-up" and uses China's renewed economic growth to that point as "strikingly confirming our faith in the power of free markets" (1962/2002, pp. viii–ix).

One of the logical objections to Rand's extreme laissez-faire capitalism is its reduction of value to what can be measured in terms of market, and ultimately financial, value. This insistence on objective measurement seems incompatible with her simultaneous regard for subjective happiness as the *telos* of human activity (Orlitzky and Jacobs 1998). Responding to Locke's (2006) anointment of Rand as the "way out of the morass" of ethical scandals beginning with Enron, Audi (2009) charges Rand, and Locke's rendering of Rand, with logical incoherence as a philosophical system. For example, Audi claims Rand's rejection of altruism is based on her erroneous understanding of it as necessarily requiring self-sacrifice. Audi calls into question the logical basis of happiness as a standard without clarifying the relationship between happiness and self-interest satisfaction. He also contests whether Rand's Objectivism really has any more legitimate claim to objectivity than any other philosophical system.

Notwithstanding those academic exchanges about Rand, for an author with such a fervent band of followers, Rand' has inspired a relative paucity of academic criticism, except for the occasional dismissive statement such as Leiter's, "She's irrelevant" (Martin 2009). Certainly, the ideological rejection of her ideas and the intellectual rejection of her logic have influenced the limited volume of Rand criticism. But perhaps as much as anything, the aesthetic rejection of her craft has been the basis for the proportionally small amount of evaluations of her work. Until 2009, when two full-length biographies (by Burns and Heller) by authors not claiming discipleship were published within a week of each other (another sign of Rand's market power), it was difficult to find reasonably unbiased accounts of Rand's life and output. *Atlas Shrugged* was shrugged off by the *New York Times Book Review* with the evaluation that it was "written out of hate" (Hicks 1957) and by the *National Review* as "silly…bumptious…[and] preposterous" (Chambers 1957). One of Rand's biographers sums up the state of commentary on Rand by referring to "the nearly universal consensus among literary critics that she is a bad writer" (Burns 2009, p. 2). All that Harold Bloom, that self-appointed keeper of the Western literary canon, could muster about her was, "Rand could not write her way out of a paper bag" (Keenan 2008).

Why, then, amid its decreasing economic relevance, logical flaws, and aesthetic mediocrity, does *Atlas Shrugged* insist on remaining a candidate for the capitalist canon? A very visible hand, the subjective judgment of market power operating under the pretense of philanthropy, has elbowed critical judgment aside, making room for *Atlas Shrugged* as a candidate in the continuing evolution of capitalist canon. In lieu of critical adoration for their hero, Allison and Rand's other advocates have used their market wealth to mount a counteroffensive incursion into educational institutions. In 2009, the Ayn Rand Institute shipped more than 350,000 copies of Rand's books to high school teachers in the United States, counting more than 1,000,000 of her novels in use in classrooms (Ayn Rand Institute 2009b). In 2008, BB&T's Charitable Foundation gave a $1 million grant to Marshall University to establish the Center for the Advancement of American Capitalism (Marshall University 2008), one of several universities in regional proximity to BB&T's headquarters to take similar conditional gifts (Keenan 2008). In a non-fictional quirk of fate worthy of great literary irony, the social investment strategy of BB&T promotes the work of free market capitalists who have been understood to question whether corporations should make social investments at all.

## Criteria for the Capitalist Canon

Asking a banker to recommend good literature seems akin to asking a professor of literature for an informed opinion on what interest rates should be. The former case is a misalignment of power, in the form of market wealth, with influence in a non-market realm. The latter example is a misalignment of power, in the form of non-market knowledge, with influence in a market realm. Allison's (and others') advocacy of *Atlas Shrugged* might be an archetypal example of the human tendency to confuse goods and preferences—that is, to believe that the novel is good because it says what one wants it to say. Meanwhile, those who disagree with Rand's ideology tend not to consider her as a legitimate artist. All commentators—detractors and supporters alike—agree that *Atlas Shrugged* is ideological, which may be part of the critical complaint against it, since works of art in which ideology overshadows narrative tend to be less aesthetically successful. (Of course, there are counterexamples to this more often than not true generalization.)

By making the introduction of Rand's work a condition of its grant, BB&T's gift demonstrated how free market activity can influence cultural values even in places, such as university and high school classrooms, that are supposed to be governed by non-market systems for measuring value. As presumed guardians of an enduring canon, academic institutions might have reasons to be wary of the influence of a free market in which prices fluctuate daily and value can be a fleeting function of popular culture. But understanding the culture of contemporary capitalist societies includes appreciating the institutional importance of that market, which not only influences and is influenced by the volatility of short-term sentiment but which over time embeds enduring ideas about what we value into our canonical cultural foundations.

Thus, one challenge associated with identifying canonical literary texts concerns relevant *expertise*. Do business executives know enough about literature to render a valid opinion on what literature deserves to endure? Probably not, judging by the received (though admittedly not universal) view that however worthy the content of

Rand's ideas, the form of the expression of those ideas is wanting. On the other hand, do literary critics know enough about business to prescribe a capitalist canon? Probably not. Moreover, there is a regrettable paucity of great literature on economic and business subjects. However, literary critics may know enough to add a literary sensibility, relevant to economic and business concerns, to a set of texts more likely to consist of political theory, military theory, biology, and economics.

Another challenge concerns the role of *market power* in determining what is canonical. A canon endures, whereas market judgments are typically fleeting. It is well established by aesthetic theory as well as by common sense that what is popular is not necessarily equal to what is good. However, this point does not mean that the machinations of the market should be irrelevant to the identification of canonical texts. A work needs to achieve recognition with some segment of the market in order to be recognized at all, to be published and reissued over time. Especially in contemporary, democratic societies, the general market takes the place of the specific benefactor in determining what works of art have the necessary support of funding or market awareness to achieve any recognition at all (Woodmansee 1994). As the cultural influences prominent in the global economy diversify, we should also expect the canon to reflect the growing diversity of the market as it evolves.

Suppose, then, that the erstwhile powers of American capitalism are chastised for their self-aggrandizing tendency to gravitate toward a book whose heroes look suspiciously like them. They have no choice but to welcome more voices to the great conversation. With an expanding set of stakeholders earning a seat at the table, what alternative stories might compete with *Atlas Shrugged* for the soul of capitalism? There are potentially innumerable possibilities, some of which have been suggested to me in conversations I have engaged in, orchestrated, facilitated, or read about on the topic of books and the values and practices of capitalism. Although these conversations have occurred on several continents, the majority of suggestions have come from Western literature, which I think is more a reflection of the capitalism we have inherited than a signal of the future of capitalism. As Bloom (1994) suggests, we might expect the content of a canon to lag reality; indeed, the descriptive function of the canon is in one sense conservative, preserving the past. Another reason why most examples are Western in origin may be that narrative literature, particularly the novel, is an artistic genre that has been more prevalent in the Western intellectual tradition. But we also need the canon to shape our normative ideals, looking to the future. As Said (1993) traces historical narrative from the colonialist's novel to the post-colonialist's novelistic response, so might we expect the canon of twenty-first century global capitalism, at some future time, to lean away from capitalism's historical Western bias.

It is relatively less difficult to find tales in Western literature chronicling the fall of the powerful than it is to find stories narrating the rise of emerging markets. The Faust legend resonates with those interested in the deals with the devil entailed by excessive wealth generation. Dreiser's trilogy on capitalism, particularly *The Financier*, warns of the potential for powerful lobsters to feast upon helpless squids in a zero-sum universe. Dickens' *Hard Times* parodies the economic tendency to take social utility to an extreme, subverting the diverse needs of individuals in need.

Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* can be read as a recent variation on the Faustian theme that characterized the Wall Street insider trading scandals of the 1980s, or it can be re-read as a precursor to the Wall Street mortgage trading scandals of the late 2000s. Notwithstanding the presence of a few classics on this short list, one grasps in vain for a wealth of good business stories.

Until the canon catches up with reality, the number of classic stories that treat economic themes relevant to the experience of rising capitalist powers might remain elusive for an outsider to identify. Munif's *Cities of Salt* has been recommended as a cautionary tale about the damage that Western oil speculators did to Bedouin communities in the Middle East, yet it does not seem destined for literary canonization. Gunesekera's *Reef* contains nostalgic memories of a failing Sri Lankan caste system, but its author is not even the most decorated among a flourishing literary community from the Indian subcontinent. Between the clichéd devices of a mystery novel, Qiu's *Death of a Red Heroine* provides an entertaining and intriguing early account of how Chinese market reforms ennobled and corrupted different portions of the Shanghai populace; however, its author writes as an expatriate critic of the old system rather than from within the contemporary system. The individual voices who recommended these books cannot be said to represent any other voices than their own, so it is not possible to say whether any of these stories will be received over time as classics warranting canonization. However, the conversation about their respective places inside or outside the canon is a conversation worth having. The canon may include any or perhaps all of these, but the question of their inclusion should be decided in a great conversation among many stakeholders rather than an exclusive conversation among a few leaders. Beyond their ability to contribute to that conversation, the stories in the capitalist canon will come to matter as they reveal the values of the present and subtly and influentially shape the future practices of global capitalism.

## An Alternative Candidate for the Canon: Mary Wolstonecraft-Shelley's *Frankenstein*

If market power can be measured by sheer popularity, then on this count, *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818/1982) likely triumphs over even *Atlas Shrugged*. Whereas *Atlas Shrugged* has appealed to certain powerful market actors, *Frankenstein* by some accounts originated or perfected the genre of Gothic horror. But it is one thing to appeal to the powerful, and another to have powerful appeal among the less powerful. While other canonical works of capitalism have entered the popular consciousness through metaphors—jungle, war, invisible hand—and descriptors—"Machiavellian"—*Frankenstein* is a well-known but often misunderstood and caricatured monster tale not often associated with business (although the monster metaphor has inspired at least a few analogies in the business ethics literature, including Dienhart 2003; Goodpaster 1991; Miller 2002).

The name "Frankenstein" belongs to Dr. Victor Frankenstein, not to the nameless being who he wrought from alchemy. Victor is arguably as much or more a monster than his creation. Although the story of Frankenstein has, in the popular consciousness, been transformed into a monster story, and transposed the name of Frankenstein from scientist to monster, the original narrative deliberately avoids suspense, instead telling its tale through a series of narrators: first, a ship's captain who is seeking a passage to the North Pole and happens upon an ailing Victor, in pursuit of the monster; second, Victor himself, telling his improbable tale to Captain Walton; and third, the monster, relating his story to his creator with hopes of sympathy and companionship.

Like *Atlas Shrugged*, *Frankenstein* depicts ambitious and powerful beings: Walton, who sees his pursuit of the North Pole passage as both a "benefit" (10) to humankind and a "glory" (12) to himself; Victor, who mimics and professes admiration for those seeking immortality and power through their creations (41); and the monster who, companionship unrequited, vows revenge (138). In contrast to Rand's exaltation of the strike of the powerful in *Atlas Shrugged*, Shelley demonstrates how monomaniacal ambition and power contribute to doom, death, and destruction. Victor's memories of childhood are replete with peaceful images of mutual affection and caring among his family members and friends, many of whom are lost through his failure to consider the "catastroph[ic]" (52) consequences of his ambition to create life and immortality. Horrified by his creation, Victor abandons it until he speculates that the tragedies that befell his young brother, William, along with the family servant and adopted sister, Justine, came from the hands of the monster, and thus from Victor's own hands.

Meeting the monster for the first time since the abandonment, Victor feels for the first time "the duties of a creator toward his creature" (97) as the monster tells his own sympathetic tale of how he came to learn about human society and language, exact revenge, and beg for forgiveness and a companion. Unlike Rand's depiction of selfishness as a virtue, Shelley suggests that people, even the monster himself, are naturally selfless, showing how the monster came to sacrifice food and shelter so as not to disturb the happiness of a family he had come to observe in the forest where he hid. He only turned back to vengeance when his benevolence (when he saved a young girl from drowning) was repaid with gunshot because others feared his appearance. When Victor breaks his promise to furnish the monster with a female companion, the cycle of vengeance becomes inevitable.

While *Frankenstein* is set even more remotely from the settings of contemporary capitalism than *Atlas Shrugged*, it is at least as current in its exploration of tensions in values influencing capitalism today: between science and spirit, human goodness and selfishness, self-realization and social contribution, as well as art and entertainment. The science that Victor practices is chimerical, a form of magic enabling him to create a life form from lifeless parts, a feat that modern science of his time and ours would of course declare impossible. While Shelley was not seeking as a literary artist to demonstrate the viability of alchemy, she might be taken to be wrestling with the contemporary tendency to value primarily that which has value in scientific estimation. In *Frankenstein*, the rationalist idea that self-interest is innate, measurable, and contributes toward the common good, is in tension with the innate obligation clearly felt by the most admirable characters to be selfless, regardless of the return on investment. Shelley raises questions as to whether the pursuit of self-realization whether it be Walton's dangerous pursuit of the North Pole passage that puts his crew in peril, or Victor's fateful pursuit of immortality—is at odds with the obligation in human society to make a social contribution through one's work. Finally, *Frankenstein* explores the line between art and entertainment, producing an enduring monster story that has arguably in the popular consciousness overshadowed the book's aesthetic contribution.

Does my argument demonstrate conclusively that *Atlas Shrugged* must be considered and ultimately rejected for the canon of twenty-first century global capitalism and that *Frankenstein* must be considered and accepted? Certainly not, but I hope that my argument might stir some such great conversations about the stories that belong. *Frankenstein* is far from the only alternative to *Atlas Shrugged* for the capitalist canon, but it does represent legitimate competition for market power while compensating in the judgment of literary experts for the many aesthetic defects of the other book. Moreover, like *Atlas Shrugged*, it celebrates the transformative power of capitalist innovation while, unlike *Atlas Shrugged*, it warns of the destructive capacity of teleopathic ambition. That both books were written by women might be taken by formalist critics to be a feature irrelevant to aesthetic judgment, but it may be taken by cultural critics to be significant to the way in which the canon of the future may evolve to represent hitherto under-represented voices in capitalism.

*Frankenstein* was allegedly one of Karl Marx's favorite books (Wheen 2006, p. 15), a reason for being both skeptical about the book's relevance to future capitalism and to look again at its economic messages. One obvious Marxist interpretation of the book—as an analogy for a worker who is alienated from the product of his labor—is quite different from the interpretation that I have explored. Instead of considering the monster's creator to be an exploited worker, my interpretation reconsiders the monster's creator as an exploitive capitalist who takes no accountability for his creation gone awry. *Frankenstein* unmistakably challenges the self-interested ideal that *Atlas Shrugged* celebrates and that Rand insists capitalism ought to uphold as a virtue. In this regard, the monster is not unlike an adjustable rate mortgage or a collateralized debt obligation in an economy in which housing prices are declining. It once seemed to breathe life into the economy until the flash of lightning in the storm revealed its hideousness, at which time all that its creator wished to do was to run away.

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# Part II
# Initiating Reform

# Chapter 5
# The Artist and the Ethicist: Character and Process

**Dawn R. Elm**

**Abstract** Artists have unique characteristics and processes for creating their aesthetic. Whether it is painting, poetry or dancing, there is a special way of perceiving and interacting with the world. In contrast to the well-known rational approach to ethical decision-making, this essay suggests that the characteristics and processes of artists are also important for making ethical choices in business. Being present in the moment, having a holistic view of the situation with passion and emotion, habits of practice and the virtue of courage allow for more complete and meaningful ethical decisions.

**Keywords** Artists • Rational paradigm • Emotion • Passion • Ethical decision-making

In business ethics, we often refer to a decision-making process that is rational, logical and objective. We don't typically suggest that ethical decision-making can be an emotional, intuitive, or aesthetic process. Why? Because we assume that the logical, rational approach will provide more objective and thus better ethical decisions. The premise of this paper is that the characteristics and processes used by artists can enhance ethical decision-making beyond this typically rational approach. In the following essay I will provide an overview of the requisite process for such a transition.

Ethical issues are often encountered in business. Examining situations such as the accounting fraud of Enron, the Snow Brand Milk Products contamination issue, Bernie Madoff's ponzi scheme, and the sub-prime mortgage crisis that resulted in the collapse of firms such as Morgan Stanley and Lehman Brothers

D.R. Elm (✉)
Department of Ethics and Business Law, Opus College of Business,
University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN, USA
e-mail: drelm@stthomas.edu

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usually suggests that some deliberative, rational process could have resulted in better ethical choices. This type of process is derived from traditional models of ethical decision-making.

## Traditional Ethical Decision-Making Research

Much of the research in ethical decision-making relies on the paradigm that better ethical decisions will result from a rational, objective process that is improved with cognitive development and practice in logical reasoning. Michaelson (2010) characterizes this viewpoint as moral objectivity. He suggests that this objectivity, as the condition of being independent of interests that could impair fair and impartial judgment of what is morally right, is thought to be so fundamental to ethical decision-making that potential conflicts of interest must be mitigated to gain an objective and rational process.

This assumption comes from many sources in moral philosophy and has been the basis for the influential work of Lawrence Kohlberg (1969, 1981) in moral psychology. He developed a theory of moral development suggesting cognitive development and maturity are needed for better moral or ethical choices. His work has been followed by others who also contend that the ethical decision-making process is underpinned by an objective, logical process. For example, Rest and colleagues extended Kohlberg's work to develop a four stage model of ethical behavior that considers moral awareness, moral evaluation (reasoning or analyzing the issue), moral intention and moral behavior (Rest et al. 1986). Trevino (1986) used the cognitive model of moral development to develop an interactionist model of ethical decision-making in business where moral reasoning is moderated by the context surrounding the issue and individual factors. Weber has continued in this tradition using moral judgment as the main reasoning process for ethical decisions and examining different situational and individual factors that might influence such a process (Weber 1990, 1996; Weber and Wasieleski 2001).

This set the stage for later research on moral intensity. Moral intensity refers to "*characteristics of the ethical issue* that compel the decision maker to employ ethical reasoning [emphasis added]" (McMahon and Harvey 2006, p. 337). Rest's and Treviño's work provided a foundation for Jones' (1991) framework for moral intensity, which targets characteristics of the ethical issue rather than the individual or situational characteristics. Jones' model again relies on an objective and rational consideration of the dimensions of a particular issue.

Additional research in the field has focused on normative models of ethical decision-making based on different philosophical approaches. For example, Brady and Wheeler (1996) looked at the ethical decision-making of individuals and found a preference for deontological thinking, while Rallapalli et al. (1998) found a preference for teleological thinking when making ethical choices. Both emphasize the logical analysis of the ethical issue regarding the intention of the actor or the consequences of the decision. Thus, much of the work that has been done assumes that better ethical decision-making involves a rational, logical approach to issues of different levels of intensity or meaning for the individual decision maker.

## Emotion and Intuition in Ethical Decision-Making

Much of this work has neglected the perspective of affective decision-making, or decision-making that is influenced by an individual's personality and subjective assessments of what is right or wrong (Eisenberg 2000; Crary 2007). This alternative approach suggests that moral judgments or decisions are driven by who we are as human beings versus solely cognitive processes. For example, Crary argues that moral judgment is a process that must be considered holistically, since individuals cannot separate who they are from how they reason. Moore and Loewenstein (2004) argue that human self-interest affects how a situation is perceived and suggest that this is automatic and unconscious, differing by personality.

Werhane (2010) expands on this in her response to Waddock's (2010) work on finding wisdom through "seeing". Werhane argues that individuals construct their experiences "as" something or other, and that the basis of this construction is language. She proposes that "seeing" as a part of moral imagination is subjectively experienced. Abowitz (2007) states that

> 'Seeing' is subjectively experienced, but is discursively constructed and socially mediated, like language. Each of us sees and interprets situations based on our own traditions, experiences, and salient moral languages. (Abowitz 2007, p. 290; Cited in Werhane 2010, p. 198)

Bazerman and Chugh (2006) add that we socially construct our experiences from a certain perspective which causes us to have bounded awareness or blind spots where we miss or ignore information about a situation. Sonenshein (2007) argues that people engage in "issue construction" when making ethical decisions. Issue construction refers to the process where individuals seek out moral meaning of the issue through perceptions and interpretations of various stimuli, including assessing others' points of view. Brady (1986) suggests a slightly different take on this by proposing that ethical managerial practices require both knowing what is ethical and knowing how to act (or decide).

The research on moral imagination is consistent with this perspective on ethical decision-making, as moral imagination is the ability to relate to others beyond ourselves and the immediate situation and to consider the potential harms and benefits of a particular action. The pragmatist philosophy of Dewey (1974) suggests that moral imagination is a key element in being able to respond to ethical situations in light of others. Werhane (2002) describes moral imagination as an affective process influencing reasoning. Moral imagination allows one to "disengage from a particular process, evaluate it and the mindset it incorporates, and think more creatively within the constraints of what is morally possible" (2002, p. 34). Werhane (2002) and Moberg and Seabright (2000) explain how managers rely on organizational schemas rather than data or information to make decisions. Although the degree of this reliance varies by individual, both believe that moral imagination can help develop creativity in the ethical decision-making process. Further, Moberg and Seabright (2000) argue that artistic inputs from various art forms can aid in developing moral imagination.

Recent research in moral psychology has also begun to arrive at the conclusion that moral reasoning and judgment is not solely an objective reasoning process. Haidt (2001) has argued that moral judgment is more intuition than logically driven. His model of intuitionist moral judgment purports that ethical decisions are made primarily by rapid intuitions rather than reasoning through to a solution. He argues that the reasoning about the moral problem takes place after the decision has been made using moral intuitions and emotions. Greene et al. (2001) also found that individual responses to moral dilemmas is primarily emotional versus reasoned. Their study showed that response times were longer for dilemmas that had certain characteristics of personal harm where an emotional response had to be over-ridden before a cognitive judgment could be made. Hamilton (2011) believes that an experienced, focused model of ethical decision-making is better than the traditional rational model. By incorporating intuition, reasoning, and interaction with others a more synthesized ethical judgment is reached.

## The Art of Ethical Decision-Making

The research on integrating the arts with ethics is part of the burgeoning scholarship on use of the arts in examining practices in management and business. Scholars have addressed this integration in leadership (Adler 2006; Waddock 2010; Colas 2005), organizational learning (Yanow 2001; Jordan et al. 2009; Elm and Taylor 2010) and related scholarship in the new field of visual ethics in journalism and film (Miles and Plate 2004). Strati (1999), for example, argues for an aesthetic approach to the study of organizations that is not exclusively a cognitive concept, but arises out of the knowledge creating activities of all the senses. However, there has not been much done that directly addresses the value or the arts and artistic practices for ethical decision-making. Collier (2006) discusses the value of artistic practices for ethics in architectural design, and Johnson (1993) examines the link between aesthetics and moral imagination, but neither author progresses to specific practices of artists that could inform ethical decision-making.

Recent work by Ladkin (2011) has gone beyond the general examination of the value of artistic practices to ethical behavior to suggest that the practices of artists/musicians can enhance ethical responses to situations by developing moral perception. She argues that three skills of artists can be used to increase moral awareness and moral perception: Staying with the Senses; Engaged Detachment; and Imaginative Free Play. Like Colas (2005), Waddock (2010) and Moberg and Seabright (2000), Ladkin argues that exercising moral awareness requires individuals to actively seek ways of seeing/knowing that are beyond typical perceptions and psychological schemas. Nussbaum (1990) concurs with the value of aesthetics in moral examination- the artist and the perceiver of art is very close to the a person of practical wisdom because morality is a high level vision requiring a response and ability of the sort valued in the great artists across time. This view is not to reduce moral judgment a matter of taste, but rather a judgment that is enhanced by the aesthetic abilities of artists.

The model I propose here is derived from a combination of intellectual collaborations, learning from the work of others before me, and my own personal experiences with artistic practices and ethical decision-making. I suggest a process that involves being present in the moment and mindful, having a holistic view of the situation through passion and emotion, having the habit of practice, and embracing the virtue of courage can enhance our decision-making about ethical issues.

Consistent with recent work by Ladkin (2011), my model assumes that ethical decision-making is a process consciously undertaken. It does not occur automatically, and it does not occur with the desire to be an ethical individual. In addition, I assume that ethical decision-making skills and capabilities can be practiced and learned, just as artists must practice their craft to excel. My intent is not to have artistic processes usurp the typical rational approach to ethical decision-making. Rather, as Koehn (2010) notes:

> Art packs an emotional punch because it appeals to our imagination and tends to burn into our souls. Artistic representations can serve as an aid or supplement to ethical thinking and reasoning, but should not be treated as a substitute for them. (Koehn 2010, p. 228)

Artistic processes and characteristics can supplement and enhance our efforts at ethical decision-making by allowing us to become more fully engaged as human beings in the process.

When an individual is faced with an ethical issue or situation, a conscious process must be engaged to reach resolution. This process has been traditionally considered as a rational, objective process that is predominantly cognitive in nature. This cognitive dimension of the ethical decision-making process is certainly important for effective ethical decision-making, but can be complemented and enhanced by adopting processes more commonly engaged in by artists to involve the whole person in the process. Collier (2006), for example, argues that there is value in using the different perspective of artists for making ethical decision. In terms of engaging the whole person, Crary (2007) purports that ethical decision-making is a process beyond moral judgment. Individuals engage in a reasoning process reflective of their personality and experiences. As such, the process must be viewed as more holistic than cognition alone. In fact, Crary contends that language is the basis of an individual's understanding of a situation and that all language is inherently moral language based on experiences and personal characteristics. Abowitz (2007) also notes that language is socially mediated and constructed.

The process presented here is one that begins with the knowledge that comes with the cognitive elements of rational ethical decision-making processes. It is enhanced by being present in the moment, having a holistic vision of the situation through passion and emotion, habits of practice, and courage.

## *Knowledge*

I have previously argued that the primacy of intellectual knowledge must be tempered by aesthetics (Elm and Taylor 2010), which is consistent with Baumgarten's theory of knowledge of "on one hand, logic, which investigates intellectual knowledge; on the other hand, aesthetics…which investigates sense knowledge" (cited in Strati 1996, p. 211). Springborg (2010), too, thinks that art is important to leadership. Creating art, from her perspective, is a set of conditions that make individuals perceive the world more directly through the senses rather than through pre-determined ideas about the world. Adler (2006) also shares this perspective regarding the value of art as lying in the expansion of traditional processes of leadership and management.

Intellectual knowledge of the ethical issue and/or situation is necessary for a conscious process to begin. It constitutes an awareness of the issue and the situation, including the facts and relevant individuals involved. Such knowledge can come in a number of ways and forms the rudimentary elements of the process. There must be an awareness and identification of an ethical issue and some relevant stakeholders for initiation of a conscious process. The degree to which an individual is aware of or frames an issue as ethical is beyond the scope of this paper. Here, I assume that once an ethical issue has been identified, the knowledge of that issue (facts, people involved) is a part of the process for an individual wishing to make an ethical decision.

Such knowledge is also needed in the arts. A dancer, for example, must have the basic skills to move his or her body, and must know the choreography of the dance. That is only the starting place, however. Routinely presenting the choreography of a dance is not dancing. It is the foundation needed to create the holistic presentation and representation of the dance. Similarly, a painter needs the technical knowledge of what types of paint and canvas to use as well as an understanding of the physical principles of color combination. These alone do not constitute creation of a painting, but are necessary to move the process forward.

This view is supported by the blossoming use of the arts in education as a means of moving beyond intellectual knowledge. For example, Dolev et al. (2001) describe their study in which medical students were introduced to fine art as part of their curriculum at Yale Medical School. After one year of learning to examine details in paintings, the medical students diagnostic skills were significantly better than medical students who had no art training. Adler (2006) discusses the increasing number of educational programs in business that have deliberately introduced the arts as a means of progressing beyond intellectual knowledge. The rise of organizations like COCAbiz, a business training division of the Center of Creative Arts in St. Louis, that use dancing, haiku and improvisation to enhance the soft skills of management not typically taught in business schools demonstrates the emerging awareness of the need to embrace the arts. Zander and Zander (1998) suggest that artists are needed to navigate this new globally connected world since they create new ways to interpret future directions:

> The radical shift in the structure of the world begs for creativity; it asks us to rethink who we are as human beings… It may be that writers, painters and musicians have an

> unprecedented opportunity to be co-creators with society's leaders in setting a path. For art, after all, is about rearranging us, creating surprising juxtapositions, emotional openings, startling presences, flight paths to the eternal. (Zander and Zander 1998, p. 7 – Cited in Adler 2006, p. 490)

Michaelson (2010) discusses aesthetic theories of value in mitigating moral objectivity of business ethics education. He notes that the term "disinterested" is used to suggest a means of negating the potential self—interest of individuals engaging in ethical examination. Michaelson's argument is that disinterested does not necessarily mean disengaged, but can actually enhance our natural responses to works of art.

> In its simplest, negative formulation, a disinterested attitude refers, like objectivity, to an absence of the motivation for self-concern. In positive terms, however, disinterested attention is motivated by value for its own sake, but rather than dousing primal, emotional urges to maximize self-interest as moral objectivity is purported to do, it accommodates our national attraction to 'significant form'–a property of art objects that contain formal qualities that evoke the emotional, feeling response we understand as aesthetic appreciation or regarding an art object from an aesthetic point of view. (Michaelson 2010, p. 204)

Waddock (2010) supports the need to move beyond the intellectual with her use of developing aesthetic sensibility as a means to gain wisdom. The development of an aesthetic sensibility notion for Waddock means attaining the quality of beauty. Consistent with the work of Abowitz (2007), she shows how aesthetic awareness combines reason, logic, perception and imagination to understand the aesthetic implications of a situation.

As a beginning for improved ethical decision-making, moving beyond the intellectual knowledge requires a person to be fully present in the moment and mindful of the world at that time. Artists engage in this practice by virtue of their unique perspectives about the world around them.

## *Being Present in the Moment*

One of the initial practices artists use is being present in the moment and carefully aware of the nature of the current situation. Being present in the moment or mindful of the moment refers to the process of reacting and interacting with the situation as it unfolds, in real time. It stimulates the engagement of the whole person in the process by consciously considering and reacting to the current moment. Paradoxically, being fully present in the moment also engages the ability to see beyond the current moment as well. Waddock (2010) suggests that wisdom combines the attributes of the good (represented by moral imagination), the true (represented by systems thinking, and the beautiful (represented by aesthetic sensibility). She argues that gaining wisdom first requires "seeing" as a means of envisioning a situation and the possibilities beyond it:

> Seeing, the ability to envision what is going on or the possibilities in a situation, is all about vision. Vision has a number of meanings. Seeing with the eye or observing what is around

> one, of course, is the most obvious. But vision also implies a power to perceive that which is not yet manifest or present; that is, it involves imagination of the possibilities as well as the consequences going forward of doing something. Shamans, mystics, and visionaries are frequently called 'seers', and it is exactly this sense of seeing that I argue needs to be developed in the pursuit of wisdom. (Waddock 2010, p. 178)

Waddock (2010) also describes meditation techniques for bringing self-awareness and mindfulness to the present moment which, while often used as a means to slow down and disengage from the complexities of life (e.g. La Forge 2004), can also be used to allow for an immediate and unrestricted response to a situation. For example, semi-discursive meditation forms typically involve forms of art. They involve group interaction or the use of some aesthetic or artistic form—poetry, drawing, acting, etc. (Waddock 2010). Such interactions engage the self in a different fashion (Collier 2006) and allow the individual to experience the situation beyond normal boundaries. Yanow (2001) discusses how techniques from improvisational theatre can improve organizational learning by creating circumstances to promote mindfulness and presence in the moment:

> Improvisation…is focused on its subject. Improv terminology for this focus is 'being in the moment.' The actor has to be fully present, fully engaged in the enterprise at hand… (Yanow 2001, p. 59)

Using improvisation as a means of engaging in the present moment can improve managerial and leadership skills. Adler (2006) discusses the advantage of improvisation as a shift from planning-then-doing to simultaneous listening-and-observing-while-doing. She notes that successful improvisation only occurs when the team members trust that their colleagues are taking care of the team's best interest. I have previously argued that being fully present in the moment is a key dimension for organizational learning by creating presentational knowing. Presentational knowing emerges from experiential knowing and provides the first form for expressing meaning and significance by drawing on expressive forms of imagery through dance, sound, music, drawing, painting, sculpture, poetry, drama, etc. (Elm and Taylor 2010).

Artists create by being fully present in the moment and "seeing" the situation in a unique way requiring complete comprehension and interaction as the process is occurring. In ballroom dancing, for example, the music is interpreted immediately and completely by the dancer. There is no time to stop and cognitively process the dance, it must be performed as the music progresses. Reaction and interaction with the music allows full and complete expression of the dance as a story with the emotions and feelings it brings. Perhaps this is why there have been increasing instances of business education programs that integrate dancing as an aesthetic form to enhance mindfulness and being present in the moment, such as Wharton's MBA workshop on Leadership Through the Arts facilitated by the world renowned Pilobolus Dance Company (Adler 2006), and firms like COCAbiz.

Ethical decision-making can be enhanced by being present in the moment while examining an ethical issue. Being fully aware and "seeing" the situation can allow for the consideration of elements and factors that might be overlooked if a stereotypical rational approach is used. Ladkin (2011) argues that staying with the senses can result in more accurate moral perception of a situation rather than relying on cognitive short cuts and labels.

Staying with the senses, according to Ladkin, is accurately perceiving the situation versus relying on cognitive short cuts or labels. She describes how students learning to draw are encouraged to view their subject upside down or from another angle to "upset" their typical perceptive process. Waddock (2010) discusses this in her examination of mindfulness as crucial to "seeing". Miles and Plate (2004) argue that seeing, believing and living are intricately conjoined. Active understanding of this interconnectedness, along with practice, can help individuals to live more fully. In their analysis of the use of cinema as a means to practice understanding this complex relationship, they suggest that critically examining cinema vs. relying on Hollywood constructed modes of vision will help us be more ethical film viewers.

Being present in the moment provides an immediate interpretation of the ethical issue that is a result of the knowledge an individual brings to the situation and his or her mindfulness of the implications. Such mindfulness allows for introduction of the personality and emotions of the decision maker as a whole person, and for creation of a vision of the situation that is holistic in nature, beyond consideration of just the logical and intellectual dimensions of the issue.

## *Passion and Emotion*

Being present in the moment allows us to bring all of ourselves into the process. That means our feelings and emotions come with the intellectual capabilities we have. Emotion and passion are key elements of the practice of artists. They are not logically analyzing an aesthetic. Rather, they are part of the creation of the aesthetic. Musicians are emotionally moved by the music and the feelings it invokes. Dancers create an emotional story with their passion and movement to music. Ron Montez, long time Latin ballroom dancing champion once described dancing as "emotion in motion", meaning that the value is in creating an experience that the dancer and the audience can relate to emotionally.

The inclusion of emotion in ethical decision-making has been part of work on moral imagination, moral psychology and moral philosophy. Werhane (2002) describes moral imagination as an *affective* process (emphasis added) that influences reasoning such that an individual can think more creatively about what is morally possible. The work of Eisenberg (2000), Greene et al. (2001) and Haidt (2001) in moral psychology has found emotion and intuition impact individual responses to moral dilemmas. Crary (2007) and Abowitz (2007) have both argued for including the whole human being in the ethical decision process since emotion cannot be separated from reason.

Emotion and passion as part of the ethical decision-making process, could contribute to a more holistic vision of a moral choice. This is not to suggest that we should eliminate the knowledge we started the process with, or allow our emotion or passion to blatantly overrule reasoning. However, recognition that the whole person, including his or her emotion and passion, is engaged in the process means we can consider moral possibilities beyond those strictly dictated by logic. Artistic endeavors help to stimulate emotion and passion and teach how to integrate this into making ethical choices.

## *Creating a Holistic Vision*

Being wholly present in the moment with knowledge, emotion and passion allows for individuals to create a holistic vision of the situation with different elements and dimensions. Creating such a vision requires "seeing" as noted above. Colas (2005) argues that aesthetics and beauty should be a value in managerial and organizational practices. While examining the stakeholder view of creating an entrepreneurial organization, he introduces the critical element of truly seeing as an artist does for the creation of a beautiful organization. He introduces Merleau-Ponty's (1942) perspective on truly "seeing" as an artist when perceiving objects. Merleau-Ponty opposed Pavlov's idea that an organism responds by reflexes to certain stimuli, arguing instead that an organism responds globally (holistically) to a change in the state of its environment that means something to it. Thus, "according to Merleau-Ponty seeing is putting the environment to sleep in order to see the object better and to enter the object" (Cited in Colas 2005, p. 82).

Ladkin (2011) believes engaged detachment and imaginative free play are necessary for enhanced moral perception of a situation. Imaginative free play is required to obtain both staying with the senses and engaged detachment. Sensory perception (and thus, moral perception) can only be improved if the imagination is allowed more freely beyond typical cognitive boundaries to new interpretations. Consistent with Johnson's (1993) assertion that imaginative processes/creativity are critical for more truly "seeing" the world as well as the inclusion of emotion and passion;

> Entering into dialogue between sensory fullness of the present moment and possible 'lines of flight' to which it might extend is at the heart of imaginative free play. Such a capability could also inform moral awareness by fostering the kind of acuity required to attend both to a given situation's nuances and undercurrents as well as its nascent possibilities. (Ladkin 2011, p. 18)

This process allows creation a holistic picture of the situation we are faced with. When seeing as an artist, we can begin to see the whole we are creating rather than just the pieces. For a dancer, this means creating a story for the audience that has meaning as a whole rather than just a routine of choreography. For a painter, or a poet this entails envisioning the work as it evolves on the page and the vision of what it can become.

The poet David Whyte has consulted with numerous business organizations. As part of his work, he reveals the power of poetry to free people from stereotypical analyses and behaviors in organizations, and allow them to bring all of themselves into the workplace (Whyte 1994). In addition, he talks about how artists must create vision, or "see" beyond the knowledge of today:

> The artist must paint or sculpt or write, not only for the present generation but for those who have yet to be born. Good artists, it is often said, are fifty to a hundred years ahead of their time, they describe what lies over the horizon in our future world…The artist…must… depict this new world before all the evidence is in. They must rely on embracing abilities of their imagination to intuit and describe what is as yet a germinating seed in their present time, something that will only flower after they have written the line or painted the canvas. (Whyte 2001, p. 241)

This vision can only be created by looking at the situation holistically. For ethical decision-making, that means the situation must be considered with all the possibilities of the future.

## *Practice*

Being present in the moment as whole individuals and seeing the situation holistically, not just based on rational or logical processes, enables us to engage in a process of ethical decision-making that is fully human. We bring our personalities, our emotions, and the way we perceive the situation. To improve this process, as with any capability, we need practice. Interestingly, research on mindfulness has suggested that mindfulness requires routines to develop. Jordan et al. (2009) argue that developing mindfulness requires both routines that are stable and rule oriented *and* routines that introduce ambiguity and instability to allow for questioning beyond the typical norms. We recognize the importance of practice even with the rational, objective model of ethical decision-making, since practice is necessary to move forward in cognitive and logical skills (Kohlberg 1969, 1981; Rest et al. 1986; Trevino 1986). Developing a habit of practice is thus widely understood as a means of learning.

Practice involves routines that are stable and allow individuals to enhance their skills at creating a vision of and an examination of ethical issues. Ladkin (2011) argues that ethical decision-making skills can be learned just as artists practice their craft. Painters, dancers, musicians and writers all apply technical knowledge gained with iterations of that application combined with emotion and a holistic vision to create art in its final stage. Practice, combined with believing and living, creates a fuller life experience since we learn how to see outside of constructed Hollywood visuals and experience film in a fuller, more ethical, fashion (Miles and Plate 2004).

Practice may be even more crucial for the process of ethical decision-making since being present in the moment, engaging emotion and passion to create a holistic vision of the situation is not typical for deciding ethical issues. Perfection of any craft, artistic or otherwise, requires that we engage in a set of routines designed to aid us in developing the capabilities needed to improve and master the craft. Integrating the way artists perceive the world including the dimensions of emotion, passion, and intuition in the moment will also require courage to engage in processes outside of normal boundaries.

### *Courage*

The virtue of courage has long been considered part of the ethical decision-making process. The traditional objective approach to examining ethical issues requires courage to move from choice to action (Rest et al. 1986; Hamilton 2011), and virtue ethics consider courage to be essential for ethical or moral behavior.

Great artists have similarly been described as courageous by virtue of their unusual perceptions of the world as well as their willingness to express themselves regardless of the personal consequences. Another lesson we can take from artists is ethical decision-making involves being willing to move beyond typical constraints and engage in a process that involves far more than cognitive skills (Nussbaum 1990; Adler 2006). It requires engaging our whole self in the process by creating a holistic vision of the situation that allows for consideration of multiple dimensions of processing. David Whyte (1974) suggested that courage is necessary for overcoming the pressures to conform in the business world. I am suggesting that courage is a virtue that can enhance our ethical decision-making by encouraging us to use the practices of artists to think differently about ethical issues as well as follow through on choices we make with action.

## Conclusion

I have argued that practices of artists can be helpful for enhancing our ethical decision-making processes. By integrating practices such as being present in the moment and fully mindful of the situation; engaging our emotion and passion to help "see" a holistic vision of the situation, by practicing and being courageous we can make more thoughtful and fully considered ethical choices. We might also be more inclined to follow our choices with behavior since all great artists were courageous enough to move beyond typical societal boundaries.

What remains is how to actually accomplish this integration. How can we become better at being present in the moment, creating a holistic vision of the issue and acting with courage? Recent work has suggested that we can begin to develop these practices through a variety of means. Koehn (2010) and Adler (2006) introduce their students to paintings as a means of developing a more fully human and holistic vision of ethical situations. Waddock (2010) has students engage in discursive and meditation and other exercises to develop the ability to be mindful and present in the moment. Yannow (2001) and Elm and Taylor (2010) use theatre as a means for developing mindfulness and courage through practice, and Dunham and Freeman (2000) use the characteristics of world-class theatre directors to improve leadership. The work of Koehn, Dunn and Brown, and Waddock in this volume all provide examples of how to integrate artistic processes into business ethics. These efforts show we are making progress in integrating the practices of artists into business learning. Continuing to expand such efforts will help move us forward in our understanding of how ethicists can learn from artists and improve ethical decision-making.

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# Chapter 6
# What's Literature to Ethics or Ethics to Literature? With Reflections on Business Ethics

**Ronald Duska**

**Abstract** The paper suggests that the typical application of ethical theories to ethical problems, including those faced in business, by asking about duties and consequences is less effective than reflecting on the stories of human life as portrayed in literature. Decisions about ethical courses of action are better determined by reflecting on visions of the good life and the blend of passion and reason involved in living such lives. Good literature shows such pictures and causes reflection about them, leading to "enlightened reflection and strengthened affections". The paper concludes with a view of some literary portrayals of business persons and their passions and character from Charles Dickens' Scrooge to Ayn Rand's John Galt.

**Keywords** Literature • Stories • Reflection • Ethical decisions

> *Quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and pride of man.* John Henry Newman.

> *For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connexion with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified.* William Wordsworth (1798/2007). *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*.

> *The novelist's problem (the traditional novelist's problem), solved intuitively or otherwise, is precisely a unification of fact and value, the exhibiting of personal morality in a non-abstract manner as the stuff of consciousness.* Iris Murdock "Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals."

R. Duska, Ph.D. (✉)
Duska Business Ethics Consulting, Villanova, PA, USA
e-mail: ronaldduska1@gmail.com

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## One Can Always Learn from Literature

That statement might offend some purists among contemporary aestheticians who would want to claim that literature is art and the function of literature as art is to delight and that to use literature for didactic purposes is to abuse it.[1] But the fact remains that literature, good literature, has always been a marvelous teacher. It humanizes us (or perhaps dehumanizes us) as perhaps nothing else can. In this paper, I want to examine a few ways in which literature aids us in dealing with ethical matters in general and ethical matters in business in particular. My conviction, which may appear perverse to some, is that in many ways literature contributes more to the clarification of values and the development of morals than the presentation and practiced use of rational assessment tools.

Further I will claim that contemporary ethical theory is inadequate, because it rests inordinately on a view of rational decision making that largely ignores or misconstrues the role the passions[2] play in guiding our decisions and giving meaning to our life. Literature, however, expresses or represents in a unique way the passionate sources of human action and consequently shows us the shortcomings of certain lives in a way that ethical reasoning cannot. In short, literature provides us with what ethical theory does not, content for what has become the formally stringent but largely vacuous enterprise of contemporary ethical reasoning about what one should do.

Over 50 years ago, G.E.M. Anscombe requested a moratorium on ethical theory. Shortly thereafter, Phillipa Foot expressed a desire that "ethicists" quit talking about "morality." Acceding, at least in part, to the wishes of these two esteemed philosophers, some ethicists turned from talking about the nature of "morality" and began to apply various ethical theories to "ethical" situations. Thus rather than just engaging in dry as dust discussions of whether "good" is a non-natural property or some such meta-ethical concern, they began to examine pertinent and substantive ethical issues, under the name of applied ethics. They discussed more practical issues. Ethicists got involved in medical, business, and engineering ethics, where topics such as abortion, genetic engineering, stem cell research, corporate responsibility, preferential hiring and a host of other issues were discussed. But as the name suggests, they developed a process of applying ethical theories such as utilitarianism or deontology to those issues.

[1] Under the word "literature", I mean to include for the most part, novels, poems, stories and dramas. I also have in mind good literature, classics, if you will, and not things like dime store novels. I am of course assuming there is a difference between run of the mill literature and good or significant literature.

[2] In this paper I am using the word "passions" rather indiscriminately in a generic sense, including a whole host of areas which would be placed under what psychologists call the affective side of humans, i.e. feelings, emotions, attitudes, dispositions, etc. Much of the sorting out of what I have in mind can be found in Robert Solomon's (1976) excellent book, *The Passions* (Doubleday 1973). The book is partly responsible for some of the directions of this paper, although I would not claim that the paper intentionally follows it, nor would I hold the book responsible for the shortcomings of my thoughts.

A standard move by many "applied ethicists" was to utilize one of the two canonized ethical theories, either the Deontological principles of Kant or Ross on the one hand or the Utilitarian principles of Bentham or Mill on the other. Discussions of practical issues in business or medicine became commonplace which involved evaluating consequences of actions or the justice or fairness of those actions. For example, if one addressed euthanasia or suicide, two problems of the same stripe: the discussion revolved around the duties to oneself and others or the contradictoriness of the taking of a human life to preserve the values of life; or there were discussions of the rationality of euthanasia or suicide in terms of the consequences of this type of action, and a determination of whether it was acceptable behavior by deciding whether it would maximize happiness.[3]

One must grant that both of these methods have something to be said in their favor, for they do show that if certain principles are accepted, certain actions logically follow as appropriate or inappropriate. Nevertheless, for anyone who has ever taught courses in applied ethics, this procedure leaves much to be desired. We have the inevitable dilemmas where the ends justify the means or where conflicts of obligations which are irreconcilable arise.

What is the problem? First, it seems to be that the application of formal rules to materially concrete problems rarely leads to definitive solutions. For every answer there is a counter objection and a kind of skepticism is encouraged. Second, even if a definitive solution could be arrived at, a highly unlikely possibility, the question of why do what is prescribed would still remain, i. e., we could still ask, "Why be moral?" "Why do what we have determined that we should?"

Still, there were defenses of these procedures. In a remarkably well written textbook called *Moral Reasoning*, Victor Grassian offered a defense for the study of ethics. According to Grassian, even though the study of ethics by itself would not make us into a good person, it could serve to help us better understand and classify our own moral principles, even refine and change them (one hesitates to ask whether for the better or worse); and it could lead us to a consistent set of principles. Grassian stated at the end of the defense:

> By studying the arguments that philosophers give for their ethical positions and the objections they pose to the views of others, a person's ability to defend his own positions and recognize their shortcomings will itself be sharpened. This is by far the most important thing that the study of ethics has to offer.[4]

Marvelous! But with all the sharpening, changing and elimination of shortcomings, something is still missing. What is the good of all this eristic ability if it leads to the sharpening of misguided principles that can be used by a despot or tyrant to

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[3] If this is so, it is clear that a task needs to be done by ethicists or at least philosophers. We need to deal more with the psychology of the passions. Literature, to the extent that it portrays them faithfully, can teach us a great deal about them. Next we need to begin to evaluate them in terms of the passions' potential for making a life good or bad. Literature again provides models. If we do this, we might begin to give our ethical considerations a content they desperately need, and talk about good men in a way that has force.

[4] Grassian (1991), p. 5.

justify his behavior? Further, what is the point if all that reasoning cannot lead to a good person behaving well? What Grassian offers is vaguely reminiscent of what the Sophists offered, is it not?

To give my point more substance let us examine a dilemma found in Grassian's text and demonstrate what ethical theorists are likely to do with it.

A Poisonous Cup of Coffee

> Tom hates his wife and, wanting her dead, puts poison in her coffee, thereby killing her. Joe also hates his wife and would like her dead. One day, Joe's wife accidentally puts poison in her coffee, thinking it's cream. Joe, who happens to be a chemist, has the antidote, but he does not give it to her. Knowing that he is the only one who can save her, he lets her die. Is Joe's failure to act as bad as Tom's action? Why or why not?

It seems fairly obvious that Grassian is using this dilemma to provoke a discussion of the difference (if there is any) between killing and letting die (a distinction that is quite useful in contrasting active and passive euthanasia, among other issues). For that, the dilemma might be pertinent. However, when we look at the questions asked, we cannot help but be frustrated. "Is Joe's failure to act as bad as Tom's action?" How would students, confronted with this question, answer it? It requires some sort of calculus to determine quantitatively the relative merits of two reprehensible actions. Presumably the answer would look something like this: From a utilitarian perspective the consequences for the woman are the same. However, Tom is liable to prosecution for homicide whereas it is unlikely that Joe is, and thus it would seem that Tom's action is worse than Joe's because it brings worse consequences. A possible answer from a deontological perspective might be that both actions are equally wrong because they use another person as a means, except that if one distinguishes between killing and letting die, one might say that Joe did not use his wife, if using must be an act of commission rather than an omission.

Note what happens. We begin with two obviously immoral acts and then are asked for reasons why one is worse than the other. The reasons are expected to be based on a very general principle, either deontological or consequentialist. Since, these principles quite often conflict, as in cases where good consequences are brought about by immoral means, neither set of reasons is persuasive.

Surely this sort of intellectual rumination is sterile. How, though, did this sort of procedure become so predominant? I suspect that ethicists, under the influence of, or in response to positivism, got locked into a quasi-scientific mode of proceeding, or perhaps more accurately into using an engineering model. If I want to achieve a certain end, I need to perform certain appropriate operations. Given an end, my only problem is to discover acceptable means. Acceptable paths are those which fall within permissible procedures-in ethics the deontological requirements of justice and fairness determine what is acceptable. Thus, we have a goal, find acceptable means, and "Voila!" arrive rigorously at an answer. Unfortunately, deontology does not tell us what ends to pursue, only to do it with equity and fairness, while utilitarianism has yet to get clear about what the appropriate ends of man are. However, wouldn't the engineering model work if we could get clear about the ends of man?

If one could find the ends of humans and get agreement on them it would seem our objections would lose their force. But how is one to determine the ends of human beings? It is quite fashionable in searching for an end to appeal to a picture or way of life which is held forth as an ideal. In appealing to such an ideal, one attempts to show how one's position on a certain moral issue can be understood in the light of that picture of the ideal life. This sort of appeal is supposed to serve as a justification of one's ethical judgments. We see this in the theory of R. M. Hare when he says, "If pressed to justify a decision completely, we have to give a complete specification of the way of life of which it is a part."·[5] Or it can be seen in the theory of P.H. Nowell Smith, when he says, "Moral philosophy is a practical science; its aim is to answer questions in the form, 'What shall I do?' But no general answer can be given to this type of question. The most a moral philosopher can do is to paint a picture of various types of life in the manner of Plato and ask which type of life you really want to lead."?[6]

It would make the task of this paper quite easy if I were to settle for either of these approaches and say, "Yes. Quite right. Except literature, or fiction (if you prefer) is much better at painting pictures than philosophy. Thus, rather than depending on philosophers, let us go to novels and plays and perhaps biographies where we get presentations of specific lives and choose the ones that appeal to us." But there is something amiss. Hare speaks of deciding on a type of life that is completely specified. Who makes choices in that way? That is simply not what we do.[7] Nowell-Smith speaks of asking what type of life we want, but that is probably not what we do either.[8] Hare and Nowell-Smith attack the problem from the engineer's model. Give me a picture of your goal (chosen with Hare, and wanted with Nowell-Smith), and then we will figure out what needs to be done to get there. Hare and Nowell-Smith are not the only people who approach ethics in this way. It is a common way of proceeding in ethics. Generally, though, the goal was given the name "Happiness." Suppose, however, we raise some seemingly outrageous questions.

Is happiness really the ultimate end of life? Or, if there is an ultimate end, is it the kind philosophers look for? Happiness is quite often construed as some goal to be pursued or some state to be accomplished as in "the pursuit of happiness." Often,

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[5] Hare (1960), p. 79.

[6] Nowell-Smith (1954), p. 319.

[7] I am well aware of the dogmatic appearance of this remark. However, even though the point of this section is critical, I am more concerned with presenting an alternative view to this type of approach which Hare and Nowell-Smith offer, than with getting bogged down in what would he important, but nonetheless tedious refutations of their approach. If I would develop an argument, though, it would be to the effect that Hare forgets that human beings make decisions in an historical environmental context and that they have been conditioned by that environment, This results in our having habits and dispositions which partly constitute what we are and limit what we decide upon. We simply do not stand back from our context and make decisions without factors influencing us.

[8] As with the claim against Hare, I will not interrupt the presentation of the main point of this paper to develop a sustained argument against Nowell-Smith. However, he ought to recognize that we do not always know what we want and that occurs because our imagination is needed to intent new goals. Sartre makes an argument to this effect in his defense of freedom in Being and Nothingness. Note that literature, by giving us imaginative views of new possibilities of living can furnish many new options. It seems that it was this sort of thing that Oscar Wilde had in mind when he asserted that "Nature imitates Art".

too, it is thought to be reducible to pleasure or at least the avoidance of pain. It is seen as the goal, *the terminus ad quem*, of life. This, however, is precisely the engineering view of life we discussed above.

Happiness, thus construed, rarely serves as a real goal in life, except according to the anemic views of our engineering friends, the Utilitarians. Aristotle's view of happiness, although quite vague and empty in terms of content seems correct to the extent that he asserts that it is not an end in the sense of a product or a *terminus ad quem* of an activity.[9] Rather it is something that accompanies activity. The good is not a thing. The end is not a good, except in the case of instrumental goods. Living well is not the achievement of something, but a state of being. We need a passion to fulfill. The fulfillment of the passion is the activity or actualization.

Anyone who has been disappointed when he has gone out for a good time ought to recognize that one does not seem to be able to "pursue" happiness successfully. This is the hedonistic paradox: those who strive for happiness rarely achieve it, whereas those who engage in pursuits in life might find it. Happiness accompanies a life process, but it is not the goal of life in the engineering sense of a goal.

If, however, the end of the life process is not to be construed as the pursuit of a predetermined goal, how is it to be construed? R.G. Collingwood[10] in writing on art makes a distinction between art and craft that may be helpful. A craft for him is an enterprise where we have a clear goal, the construction of an object, in mind and where specific steps can be taken to achieve that goal. Collingwood's notion of a craftsman parallels our notion of an engineer. But art is not craft. The true artist does not know his end: he discovers it as he works it out. He works it out through the expressing of his emotions. As Wordsworth claims, "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of emotions. recollected in tranquility".[11] I would like to suggest that human life is also the working out of our emotions or passions, without, a clear notion of what the end is because the end is not a what, it is an activity. Thus, if ethics or morality concerns itself with the art of living, it should do this viewing life as art in Collingwood's sense and not in the sense of art as a craft. Sort of Kant's purposiveness without purpose. A moment of aesthetic taste.

But let us see whether the living out of life is really like the working out of an art piece as Collingwood describes it. When a painter puts a line on the canvas he thereby limits the next line. It can be an indefinite number of lines, but it cannot be just any old line and be appropriate. When an author sketches his character, the character can develop in any number of ways but not just willy-nilly. By page two of *Catcher in the Rye*, there are things that Salinger can do with Holden Caulfield, but there are also things he cannot do. To complete the work he must be creative, but creative within the limits set by the opening lines. Just as Salinger creates Caulfield without fully foreseeing possible outcomes, we create our lives without fully foreseeing possible outcomes. In sum, we do not know where we will end up, but a large part of the working out will depend on where we are. We need to respond

[9] Aristotle (1997), *Nicomachean ethics.*

[10] Collinwood (1938), esp. pp. 128–135.

[11] William Wordsworth, *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads.*

creatively to where we are to make our life a finished whole. In contemporary jargon, our life is a "narrative".

There is an old song "The Gambler," which can also be seen as analogous to human life. One of the verses runs, "Every hand's a winner and every hand's a loser" while another runs, "You never count your money while you're sittin' at the table. There'll be plenty time for countin', when the dealin's done." In the game of life, the cards one is dealt and the attitudes one has dictate what one does to be successful—live well. One can fold with bad cards, or one can bluff. One can lose with good cards or see it through and perhaps win. It depends on what one does with what one gets, and yet there are no guarantees. The point is that in most people's lived existence, the best laid plans go awry. Thus, to view the living of a human life as analogous to the process of an engineer building a bridge or a craftsman making a product is to misconstrue what is involved. The life of the business person, as business person, is one of risks and rewards, which must be balanced over against the life as a whole.

Very well, then, what is involved? To get at that, I would like to turn to Camus' treatment of a classical literary figure, Sisyphus. Consider the closing lines of Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus.*

> I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is Will. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself form a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.[12]

Incredible as it sounds, Camus suggests that Sisyphus is happy. This, however, is in no way the happiness associated with pleasure, but rather a happiness coming from a life that is full. Note that Camus asserts, "The struggle… is enough to fill a man's heart." Obviously, if we wish to call Sisyphus "happy" in Camus' sense, we need to revise our meaning of the concept, since it does not accord with our common understanding of happiness. But let us leave that and recognize that what Camus is doing is approving of Sisyphus because he has made his life full. Could we not say that in the midst of a meaningless existence Sisyphus has carved out a meaning-full or fulfilled life?

Note further that Sisyphus does not choose his life. His lot is given. "One always finds one's burden again." Further Sisyphus' does not get what he wants. He, like the gambler, makes the best of what he gets. Nowcll-Smith's "wants" and Hare's "choice" are off the mark because life does not proceed the way they imagine. Their quasi-scientific engineering model has led them astray, and to the extent that happiness is construed as an end to be pursued, it can serve as a goal for only the most shallow kinds of lives.[13]

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[12] Camus (1955).

[13] This might explain why it is so difficult for academics without business experience to understand and sympathize with business people. Their lots are so different. In the book *Back to Reality*, Gustav Thibon (1955) emphasizes the difference between being a farmer and being an agriculture professor. The farmer's crop can fail. He can lose. The professor doesn't risk anything. That fact leads to two radically different ways of viewing things.

But if the craft—engineering model won't do, what will? The clue to this can be found in Sisyphus. Making one's life full seems to be the answer. But if we look at what makes Sisyphus' life full, it seems to be his determination and disposition, those things I would wish to include under the rubric of the passions.[14]

If then the meaningful life is the passionate life, where do we go to find out about it? The best portraits of human passion are found in literature. They are not found in Ethics and some would argue that they are not found in Psychology either. Be that as it may, literature is surely a primary source. Let us claim then that passions are a necessary condition for a full human life, and turn to a piece of literature which not only shows this, but simultaneously depicts the struggle of a person with her passions. I have in mind Amy Lowell's *Patterns.* What this poem teaches us, or at least shows us, is that we are not automata hooked up to a conveyor belt leading us down the road to happiness. We are individuals in a situation with our passions, and we must try to make the best of it. Recall the closing lines.

In Summer and in Winter I shall walk
Up and down
The Patterned garden paths!
In my stiff, brocaded gown.
The Squills and daffodils
Will give place to pillared roses, and to asters, and to snow.
I shall go
Up and down,
In my gown.
Gorgeously arrayed,
Boned and stayed.
And the softness of my body will be guarded from embrace
By each button, hook, and lace.
For the man who should loose me is dead,
Fighting with the Duke in Flanders,
In a pattern called a war.
Christ! What are patterns for?[15]

This is a picture of life, but it is not full. It is empty because it has lost its passion. Lowell's heroine does not stand back objectively and put forth models of the good life. She cannot do that with her own life. She is in the middle of it. Her wants and her passions are removed. What is to be done? The answer is fairly clear. . . new passions must develop. Patterns, rules if you will, are not enough. There need to be passions for some good.

Could we not also suggest that empty moral rules are not enough? We learn two things from Lowell. Patterns are rules, and following them is not enough to live life fully. That is Stoic, but like Cicero, it denies the moral probity of the Passions. We need to be passionate. No one deeply in love ever asks whether life has meaning. No one passionately engaged in a task asks the question either. But will just any

[14] And yes dispositions are virtues. But they must be dispositions toward the good. In business, what is the good toward which one aims? Profit? Is that a good?

[15] Lowell (1971), p. 27.

passions do? Passions may be a necessary condition for a full life, but are they sufficient? Is not something else necessary?

To examine that question I wish to cite some lines from Othello. Note his final speech wherein he bemoans the passions that lead him to his end.

> Soft you; a word or two before you go.
> I have done the state some service, and they know't.
> No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,
> When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
> Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak
> Of one that loved not wisely but too well;
> Or one not easily jealous, but being wrought
> Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,
> Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe; one of whose subdued eyes
> Albeit unused to the melting mood,
> Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
> Their medicinal gum. Set you down this;
> And say besides, that in Allepo once,
> Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
> And smote him, thus. (Slays himself.)'[16]

Here is without doubt a man living out his passions. He loved, not wisely but too well. Here is a life certainly not seeking happiness. It is a tragic life. Othello shows that while the passions may make life full, they do not necessarily make for the best life. The passions must be evaluated.

But the evaluation of passions is by no means impossible. Certain passions are appropriate, others not. For example, there are times my anger is inappropriate. There are passions that are destructive. One could argue that Lowell's heroine's life is empty. We see that. Othello's life is tragic. Why? Because jealousy is a destructive passion, just as is hate. One could even argue that Sisyphus' obstinacy is not the best of passions.[17] Even though it gets him through his burdens, it does not allow a life to flower as it might.

We make value judgments about passions easily. Lowell's heroine needs a new passion to make her life full. Othello, on the other hand, does not need more passion; he needs better ones. In some situations passion itself is required; and in others some passion should have been checked. So three points: passion is part of a well lived life; some passions are better than others; and good literature can *show this* more forcefully than any philosophical treatise.

Literature has the ability to show the deficiencies and strengths of the passions. I am not sure I can solve the epistemological question of how this is possible, but it does seem to be a fact. One thought comes to mind though as worth pursuing. If living human life is like doing art in Collingwood's sense, and if there are ways

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[16] Othello, ACT V. Scene 2.

[17] Or is it a virtue that allows him to go on even though his life cannot flower in other ways?

of evaluating art, perhaps we can find some clues for evaluating life in aesthetics. This is not a new suggestion. It was made by Wittgenstein when he said that ethical reasons may well be like aesthetic reasons. When one looks at the literary critic, the appreciator of art, his/her task is not to tell us whether the object of art is good or bad, but to show us how to look at it to appreciate it. Similarly, the creator of literature allows us to look at lives other than our own and see the consequences of them. Kant talks about taste being able to appreciate and judge the inner coherence of an object of art when he talks about purposiveness without purpose. Thus we see Othello's universe and his passions without tying them to any particular end except to recognize his following his passions was tragic. However, we are not able to develop this theme further at this time, not so much for lack of space as for lack of knowing how. Consequently, I leave that as a topic to be pursued at a later time and move on to consider how literature can aid in the ethical evaluation of business.

How can literature aid in the evaluation of business? There are any number of novels which depict business and business men, from the *Rise and Fall of Silas Lapham* to *The Firm*. It is astounding how the characterization of the culture of *The Firm* anticipated the culture of Health South, or how *The Bonfire of the Vanities* shows the corruption of Wall Street moguls. But there are two pieces of literature that I would like to reflect on that teach us a moral lesson—Aesop's fable of Midas and *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens. They show us moral bankruptcy in a way that philosophy cannot. Consider Aristotle, who depicts those who

> …turn every quality or art into a means of getting wealth; this they conceive to be the end, and to the promotion of the end they think all things must contribute. How can that be wealth of which a man may have a great abundance and yet perish with hunger, like Midas in the fable, whose insatiable prayer turned everything that was set before him into gold…

Since ethics argues by analogy, what would be a better or more powerful way of showing something to be unethical than to paint a picture of it? Midas is morally bankrupt. All can see that. Aristotle then explains it.

> The origin of this disposition in men is that they are intent upon living only, and not upon living well; and, as their desires are unlimited, they also desire that the means of gratifying them; should be without limit.[18]

Alisdaire MacIntyre refers to human beings as story telling animals on a narrative quest.[19] Aesop's fables are that kind of product. Clearly the story of Midas teaches (shows) us that the accumulation of money cannot be an end in itself.

I would even make the argument that the unlimited quest for profit cannot be a sufficient end for business, for business itself needs to be a social instrument for producing goods and services, otherwise it has no raison d'etre. Aristotle's work is full of references to stories to make his point. Contra in to Plato's belief that the poets should be kept from the republic because their product was an imitation of reality and drew us away from the truth while stirring the passions, Aristotle claimed

[18] Aristotle (1981), Politics, Bk. 1, Ch. 9.1258a13–14.

[19] MacIntyre (1984,1985).

poetry is "finer and more philosophical than history"[20] For Aristotle poetry and hence literature was a superb way to give us experience, and hence provide that essential element that was necessary to determine ethical matters well. For Aristotle, ethics was always situational. He claims:

> What we need is to do the right thing, at the right time, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people with the right aim, and in the right way. That is the characteristic of excellence or virtue.[21]

My second example is one that arises when I am dealing with the question of the primary responsibility of the business man. Often my MBA student will insist (with Milton Friedman) that the primary and only responsibility of business is to maximize profit. Whether one agrees with that or not, an interesting rejoinder is to apply Friedman's principle to Ebenezer Scrooge, and ask, if making profit is the be all and end all, what exactly is wrong with Ebenezer Scrooge? Dickens shows us what is wrong with Scrooge.

> External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty.[22]

This description depicts a man consumed by the accumulation of wealth. The novel details Scrooge's transformation and his passionate return to other aspects of life. But is Scrooge more in line with Friedman than John Galt from *Atlas Shrugged*? Consider only a part Galt's speech in the Ayn Rand's novel:

> I am a trader. I earn what I get in trade for what I produce. I ask for nothing more or nothing less than what I earn. That is justice. I don't force anyone to trade with me; I only trade for mutual benefit. Force is the great evil that has no place in a rational world. One may never force another human to act against his/her judgment. If you deny a man's right to Reason, you must also deny your right to your own judgment. Yet you have allowed your world to be run by means of force, by men who claim that fear and joy are equal incentives, but that fear and force are more practical.[23]

I would suggest that Dickens and Rand present two different pictures of a human being, one needing to be redeemed and the other self-assured. Which is the clearer picture of the profit seeking entrepreneur is left to the reader, but it is a fact that these portraits, just as the portrait of Midas, present us with moral role models. On that basis, given the particularity of the human condition, and the fact that each ethical challenge is unique, I would contend that one learns more about moral behavior by being exposed to great literature than by applying general moral principles. Scrooge's early dispositions are not to be emulated. Are Galt's?

Some concluding points. First, if ethical theorizing is irrelevant, it is irrelevant because it misconstrues what life is really like, and its procedures for determining what to do fail to take into account the psychology of the passions and the passions'

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[20] Aristotle, *The Poetics*, Ch. 9, 1451b5.

[21] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book II, Ch. 6, (1106b21–23).

[22] Charles Dickens (2010), *A Christmas Carol*.

[23] Ayn Rand (1996), *Atlas Shrugged.*

role in making life meaningful. To the extent that literature portrays, imitates or represents human life, it shows us that most lives are problematic and, rather than being lives in pursuit of happiness, they are attempts to live out life, perhaps with a hope that we can eke out a bit of happiness along the way, but more importantly in a meaningful way. And, literature shows clearly that the meaning most often comes from the passions.

Literature also shows us different ways of coping with certain problems and perhaps even shows the shortcomings and flaws of certain lives. All of these contributions are important. Literature is relevant to moral considerations because it deals with human beings' inner lives as they are, even if the characters are fictional, whereas theoretical ethics deals mainly with rules and maxims that seem so formal that they hardly touch human lives. Perhaps, most importantly, literature, in allowing us to identify with others, allows us to develop empathy, a requisite for developing our ability to care. It sharpens our moral imagination by allowing us to vicariously experience other ways of living, and, as Adam Smith points out, empathy and sympathy are the basic moral sentiments.

Kate Jennings points out how this happens in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral.* In that work, Roth gets inside the life and mind of a Newark glove manufacturer to unsettling and provocative effect, creating a far wider readership than a nonfiction book on the decline of manufacturing in New Jersey could achieve. Here is Roth's hero Swede Levov, railing unforgettably against the self-satisfied intellectuals who make assumptions about his work:

> These deep thinkers were the only people he could not stand to be around for long, these people who'd never manufactured anything or seen anything manufactured, who didn't know what things were made of or how a company worked, who, aside from a house or a car, had never sold anything and didn't know how to sell anything, who'd never hired a worker, fired a worker, trained a worker, been fleeced by a worker — people who knew nothing of the intricacies or the risks of building a business or running a factory but who nonetheless imagined they knew everything worth knowing.[24]

If this is so, it is clear that a task needs to be done by ethicists or at least philosophers. We need to deal more with the psychology of the passions. Literature, to the extent that it portrays them faithfully, can teach us a great deal about them. Next we need to begin to evaluate them in terms of the passions' potential for making a life good or bad. Literature again provides models. If we do this, we might begin to give our ethical considerations a content they desperately need and to talk about good men in a way that has force.

Let me conclude with a short comment on a few lines written by Stephen King: "If we say that morality proceeds simply from a good heart-which has little to do with ridiculous posturings and happily ever-afterings—and immorality proceeds from a lack of care, from shoddy observation, we may realize we have arrived at a critical stance, one both workable and humane. Fiction is the truth inside the lie."[25] If morality has to do with the heart, the passionate side of man and immorality with

[24] Jennings (2001).

[25] King (1981), p. 31.

a lack of care, then is it not obvious that we ethicists need to investigate these areas with much more concern? And is it not also obvious that one of the best places to start to understand and experience the passionate human being is in literature?

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# Part III
# Reform in the Classroom

# Chapter 7
# Ethical Darkness Made Visible: Michael Moore's *Roger and Me*

**Daryl Koehn**

**Abstract** Film can be used effectively to teach business ethics, but, for a variety of reasons, teachers need to choose wisely which films to use. In this paper, I argue that Michael Moore's film *Roger and Me* is especially well-suited for use in a business ethics classroom, in part because it avoids some of the problems associated with other films. Moreover, the film does several things that standard business ethics textbooks do not do. Through this visual medium, Moore is able: (1) to make the audience complicit at least to some degree in the dynamics it portrays; (2) to raise questions about the status of those whose voice is heard (including the voice of Michael Moore) and of those who do not get to speak or are actively silenced; and (3) to perform its magic through a powerful "showing" instead of a plodding "telling". This multi-faceted capability of art fuses the ethical with the aesthetic (where "aesthetic" is understood to refer both to the specific powers of art and to the sensed dimension of ethical issues).

**Keywords** Ethics • Literature • Film • Aesthetics

Several business ethicists have proposed using film to teach business ethics. The use has been justified on numerous grounds. Films increasingly are taking on explicitly moral topics such as America's corporate involvement in wars being waged abroad, the character of large multinational corporations, the causes of the financial collapse, the reasons for the Enron debacle, etc. The subject matter of films has thus begun to overlap significantly with the subject matter of the discipline of business ethics.

In addition, advocates contend that the presentation style or form of films is particularly well-suited to ethics education in several respects. Films provide viewers

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*Perhaps it is necessary to imagine much, in order to know a little*. Etienne Gilson

D. Koehn (✉)
Department of Ethics and Business Law, Opus College of Business,
University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN, USA
e-mail: koehnd@stthomas.edu

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with “a concrete representation of experience that contains relevant moral features that may be absent from experience itself.[1]” A film may, for example, provide privileged access to an individual’s intentions. Film places viewers in a position of relative omniscience insofar as the viewer is permitted to know consequences of a decision, outcomes the characters themselves may not grasp or understand. Proctor and Adler (1991) note that films permit young students to evaluate processes in action and to see parts of the world beyond their own sphere. By providing the audience with a single, complete action, the filmmaker permits students to analyze an action from start to finish. Berger and Pratt (1998) add that some films (e.g., films based on plays by David Mamet) enable students to take a larger systems view of entire fields of business activity (e.g., selling; public relations) and to critique the values embedded within these larger fields.

Films are dramatic works and, as such portray societal values, often giving a balanced view of both good and bad human practices (Mockler 2009). By asking the viewer to make sense of characters’ choices and lives, films help educate us to make moral sense of the world at large. In this respect, films are akin to works of literature, which provide “war stories” of the sort that are routinely used to socialize new members of a profession into that group (Michaelson 2005). Often films prove to be more memorable than lectures. When lecturing is the main delivery mode, students usually forget more than half of the course content within a few months (Desiraju and Gopinath 2001).

These justifications are plausible. I think, though, that there are other compelling reasons for using films to teach business ethics, reasons grounded in a work of art’s ability (1) to make the audience complicit at least to some degree in the dynamics it portrays; (2) to raise questions about the status of those whose voice is heard (including the voice of Michael Moore) and of those who do not get to speak or are actively silenced; and (3) to perform its magic through a powerful “showing” instead of a plodding “telling”. This multi-faceted capability of art fuses the ethical with the aesthetic (where “aesthetic” is understood to refer both to the specific powers of art and to the sensed dimension of ethical issues).

Before making this case, I want to issue a caution. There are downsides to introducing films into the classroom, problems not often discussed by proponents of film use in ethics courses. Films must be chosen carefully. For, if the chosen film (e.g., The Corporation or Supersize Me) strongly pushes a very clear point of view in almost every frame, then students are easily turned off. Some students (perhaps rightly) perceive this sort of film as a form of political indoctrination that does not belong in the college classroom. Conversely, if one selects a more popular, non-controversial film (e.g., Wall Street), then some students will emit a sigh of relief, rejoicing that they “get to watch a movie” instead of having to engage in critical classroom discussion. These students settle in for a passive hour and a half of entertainment. Given that it is not the role of university professors to entertain students, a teacher’s uncritical reliance on films borders on a breach of professional duty.

[1] Michaelson (2005).

A mere hope that a film will somehow spark the "moral imagination" of students does not seem sufficient to justify devoting one or two class periods to a viewing.

Here I have chosen to focus on the ethical pedagogical value of Michael Moore's *Roger and Me* because this film avoids some of the problems that arise with using hard-hitting documentaries or blockbuster films; and because the film, by virtue of its form as well as content, raises major issues overlooked in standard business ethics textbooks, doing so in a way that embodies the particular powers of art noted above.

## A Brief Overview of the Film

At first glance, *Roger and Me* seems to be a documentary about the moral evil of the closing of the General Motor's plant in Flint, Michigan. This particular plant was the site of the strike that won auto workers many rights and that marked the founding of the United Auto Workers union (UAW). In addition, Flint was the birthplace of General Motors (GM) and the hometown of Michael Moore. Consequently, when the firm decided to close the Flint plant, residents of the city and Moore himself were stunned. Moore documents residents' despair as he explores the ramifications of the plant closing for the city. However, Moore also touches upon differences between the Midwest and West Coast; his personal history with various celebrities who had endorsed GM's products over the years; narcissism; the nature of private property and a host of other topics. Consequently, it is a gross and misleading over-simplification to characterize the film as a visual rant about the evils of capitalism or globalization.

Precisely because Moore includes so many encounters that initially appear to be peripheral to the morality of plant closings; and because so many of his interviewees give unintentionally funny responses, the film does not alienate students. It bemuses as it critiques and questions. Don't get me wrong. Moore definitely has a bee in his bonnet He obviously is unhappy about the closing of the Flint plant, the site of so much of his family's history. His father and uncles worked for GM; one uncle was even part of the famous sit-down strike. But, as Moore pursues GM CEO Roger Smith all over the country with a view to asking him about the plant closing in Flint, the viewer begins to get the sense that Moore himself is genuinely puzzled and is trying to understand deeper issues: What is the nature of capitalism? When and why did things go wrong at GM? Is the American economy as a whole in severe trouble? Is anyone responsible for corporate layoffs? Is it even possible to hold executives or other particular individuals accountable? And, equally crucially, who gets a say when it comes to answering such questions. The proliferation of such questions means that students cannot readily dismiss Moore as a left-wing liberal nut job. And since Moore himself seems rather befuddled by everything he is seeing and hearing, most students do not find him offensively abrasive. On the contrary, given the current bleak job prospects for many college graduates, they, at some level, share Moore's concern about the future of the American middle class. Not a few students sympathize with the laid off autoworker who acts in anguish, "What kind of future is there for me and my kids?"

*Roger and Me* works well, then, in an ethics classroom insofar as it does not alienate students who fancy themselves conservative or liberal. What, though, can we say on the positive side? Does the film engage the students in an ethically defensible way? I would argue that it does so in at least four ways: (1) it not only raises crucial questions about the accountability of others but simultaneously imposes some measure of accountability on the viewers themselves; (2) it calls attention to issues not usually discussed in standard business ethics textbooks (e.g., the problems the dispossessed face in having their perspective heard); (3) it shows, rather than tells, these issues and thus invites viewers to make imaginative, yet critical, leaps of the imagination as part of assessing what is going on in the larger world around us; and (4) it depicts multiple forces that are at work simultaneously and thus encourages more systematic thinking on the part of viewers.

The best way to make this case is to examine in some detail certain large themes that emerge within the film.

## Accountability at the Micro-, Meso- and Macro-Level

Westerners often expect corporations to self-regulate. In effect, we ask firms to hold themselves accountable for acting in an ethically sound fashion. Businesses themselves frequently pledge to become self-regulating in order to avoid onerous governmental regulations. Yet, unless corporate managers have some sense of the consequences of their acts—some sense of the meaning their behavior has in the public sphere—, they are unlikely to perceive and judge their deeds correctly. In this respect, organizational or meso-accountability presupposes individual or micro-accountability.

Moore does a brilliant job of showing how insensitive GM management (largely white in the late 1980s and still so today) was to the plight of the workers (a large percentage of which were African-American) it was laying off. This indifference both stems from and produces distances of various types. As Moore's film crew drives around Michigan ostensibly in search of GM's CEO Roger Smith, the viewer comes to see that management and workers live largely separate existences. The executives do not reside in gritty downtown Detroit or in working class Flint but in manicured (and gated) suburbs outside of Detroit. The distance between managers and other employees is psychological as well as physical. Immediately after the first large Flint layoff, GM executives attend a Great Gatsby party held in the suburbs. The hosts have hired laid off workers to act as "human statues". These former workers (all of whom are African-American) are expected to be seen, not heard. The workers are thus silenced by GM twice. Having lost their jobs, they no longer have any voice in GM. In their new job, they are expected to be decorative things, not feeling, living persons who have moral claims upon the attention of GM management.

A great aesthetic advantage of film is its ability to bring together many disparate elements and to show them all operating concurrently. It is not merely that art works provide concrete instances of actions and choices as they occur; art works also offer rich examples of multiple factors reinforcing each other. In that respect, great art is intensely alive, connecting with, exhibiting, and calling into many of the dynamics at play in daily existence. Such art is not merely decorative like GM's human statues.

Moore's film is very much alive in this way. At one point, Moore gains access to a local suburban country club courses and films the wives of some GM executives playing golf. When he asks them what could or should be done for jobless auto workers, the women reply that the workers need to stop being so lazy and go out and look for jobs. "We have such a good welfare system" that there really is nothing more that can be done. This unthinking response again doubly damns the unemployed workers. In effect, these wives are making the following claim: "'We' (employed Americans) have already acted in a caring way to assist the unemployed, and so if they slip into poverty or become homeless, it must be their fault. We bear no responsibility for these workers' suffering (despite our choice to lay them off) and so we have no duty to assist them further." In this case, Moore shows us a linguistic distancing from accountability. The women continue on their merry way, praising the wonderful life in Flint. The irony of their condemning the former workers when they themselves have likely never held a paying job completely eludes them. Since the physical isolation bought by their wealth means that these women likely will never encounter any of those whom their executive husbands laid off, their hypocritical stance will almost certainly last unless and until someone confronts them with the inconsistencies in their position. Yet breaking through their indifference is hard because they have rationalized their way out of any responsibility. Physical, psychological and linguistic distancing are simultaneously occurring, and Moore's film is able to reveal as much in a single scene.

Such distancing makes it difficult for corporate executives such as those running GM to grasp how devastating a plant closing or a widespread layoff can be for those who have not accumulated large savings, who do not have a working spouse, or who are too old to find new work easily. Employees who have lost their jobs are typically not in any position event to try to hold their former masters accountable. Most of their energy must be devoted to finding gainful employment. Getting a new job is not easy, for when a large company lays off tens of thousands of workers; the entire regional economy often goes into a nosedive for at least several years. Furthermore, some workers may be psychologically fragile from years of seesaw employment. Moore films one former autoworker shooting hoops at the local mental health clinic. He had been laid off five times by GM and one day finally cracked under the pressure.

Of course, all workers, managerial and non-managerial, have a responsibility to look after themselves. In a capitalistic system, no government can guarantee full employment, so some people will always be out of work. Nor can there be any absolute assurance that an individual can work at the same job until he or she retires. Moore films a fast food manager who explains that he had to fire some former autoworkers because the autoworkers were not able or willing to learn the skills needed to keep up with the hectic pace at his restaurant. The scene suggests that these autoworkers are at some level refusing to take responsibility for their future. Perhaps they find restaurant work too demeaning. Or perhaps they are accustomed to being able to slack off on the assembly line.

On the other hand, GM had created and encouraged an expectation among their workers that, as long as they worked hard and well, they would have a job with GM. For years, GM had sponsored the local Flint parade. Moore shows corporate footage of the parade, the theme of which was "Teamwork." These clips show GM executives praising the wonderful products that managers and workers had jointly produced. A few minutes later, Moore inserts a clip of Roger Smith telling workers that they have no right to expect any job security with GM. This juxtaposition sparks a question in the viewer's mind: What happened to the much-lauded "team" of managers and workers pulling together to produce great cars? The firm is still around but workers are being laid off en masse.

It looks as if GM invoked and celebrated the tacit social contract it had with its workers only as long as that contract functioned to management's advantage. The minute the contract ceased to be convenient; GM management denied that it had any responsibility to try to keep workers employed by inventing new products or retraining workers to keep them productive and thus employable. Indeed, one manager at the Gatsby party tells Moore that "we" started the Industrial revolution. When Moore presses the executive, it becomes clear that this manager's "we" apparently includes only management, not the workers. So, even if the workers had tried to hold GM accountable for the layoffs, they would have difficulty doing so because the tacit social contract was always just that—tacit.

Once GM unilaterally asserted that there was no such contract, the workers had little recourse. The UAW acceded to management's plans to close numerous plants. In the absence of union resistance, the autoworkers had no other legal protection. Under the American doctrine of employment at will, employers may hire and fire employees as they please as long as these acts do not run afoul of any laws. In fact, a GM spokesperson goes so far as to say that the "US autoworker has a new emphasis on job security. We want to help them with that." He adds that GM wants the workers to understand that there are no guarantees.

Given that individuals have trouble holding executives accountable, perhaps corporate accountability can be achieved by government action. Moore touches upon this option by filming the visits to Flint by President Ronald Reagan and Michigan Governor Jim Blanchard. Neither politician is able to propose a viable remedy for joblessness. President Reagan ran for office ran as a neoconservative, and neoconservatives usually favor a market solution in which the economic system adjusts to remedy unemployment. In practice, this "solution" places the burden squarely back on the individual. When President Reagan comes to Flint, he recommends that all laid off workers move to another part of America. But moving costs more than some unemployed people can afford. In other cases, workers have obligations they must fulfill to family members who cannot relocate. These scenes reveal the problems with looking to the government to impose accountability on corporations. Macro-accountability is not workable if and when government officials are unwilling to involve themselves in labor market dynamics. Moore complicates the problem of corporate accountability by disclosing the various ways in which this issue intersects with private property (a topic rarely touched upon in business ethics textbooks). In a capitalistic system, owners and managers both deploy and accumulate capital. The legal systems in most Western countries treat such capital as private property. While a system of private property has many advantages (which Moore never denies; indeed, he earns and retains film royalties because they are his), Moore grasps that private property sometimes functions as a barrier to accountability. When Moore tries to go up to CEO Roger Smith's office, he is told that he cannot do so without an appointment because the upper floors of the headquarters building are "private property." When he attempts to see Smith at one of the various clubs to which Smith belongs, he is ushered off the premises. The club is "private", and Moore cannot enter unless he is a member.

In all of these ways, then, the American capitalistic system insulates an organization and its management from efforts to make them accountable to the public. The individual managers would, one hopes, hold themselves responsible. As the word suggests, to be "responsible" means to answer others who have a right or even a duty to ask for a response. Yet, as Moore so dramatically reveals, social, economic, geographical and legal divides tend to prevent the management class from developing any empathy towards those whom they have harmed (albeit unintentionally) through, for example, layoffs. Lacking empathy, executives feel no obligation to speak with, much less answer to, the larger community.

The only person throughout the whole firm who seems genuinely troubled by hypocrisy and who struggles to be responsible is Moore's friend Janet. The founder of Michigan's first feminist radio station, Janet has become an Amway color analyst in order to earn extra income for her family. A color analyst evaluates a client's complexion and then characterizes the client as belonging to one of two color groups: warm colors (spring; autumn) or cool colors (summer; winter). When Janet discovers that she herself was mis-analyzed by her Amway mentor, she calls up Moore to have him come and film her offering an apology to all of her past customers. Janet explains that she is a "spring," not an "autumn." Although her confession at one level seems trivial, the viewer is moved by her mortification. She has been holding herself out as a color expert and has presumed to tell others what to do, but she did not realize her own season! Her genuine desire to try to put things right stands in mark contrast to the indifference of others in Flint who have caused very greater distress to others but who have done nothing to assist them.

Meso- or organizational accountability in a capitalistic system requires micro-accountability of the sort Janet displays. Yet it is precisely this form of responsibility that is in short supply among the corporate executives whom Moore films. Indeed, defenders of capitalism often let individual executives off the hook. They assume that (1) executives, taken individually or collectively, bear little responsibility for layoffs, firings, reductions-in-force (RIFs), etc.; and (2) the economy is sufficiently robust to generate enough new jobs so that few of those who have been "riffed" will suffer for extended periods. As long as workers are willing to move to where the new jobs are being created, they can find work. America's historically strong economy coupled with its mobile society has, during previous recessions, validated these assumptions. In the past, people did not need to show solidarity and take a stand to fight for economic justice because the larger system rendered to people their due (as long as they were willing to look for jobs and then to work hard). *Roger and Me* was released in 1990, but already at this early date, Moore is casting doubts on this rosy picture.

When the GM spokesperson Tom Kaye argues that laid off autoworkers can go to work for smaller firms like the Michigan company that makes lint rollers, Moore is incredulous: Lint rollers as the solution to the demise of large scale, skilled manufacturing in the US? Moore presumably would not contest the fact that small businesses have been the engine of job growth in the US. I understand him rather to be saying that it is unlikely that small businesses can absorb the huge number of workers that American firms have shed through outsourcing and provide these workers with a middle class existence. In some respects, Moore has been vindicated: the US jobless rate has risen as jobs have been outsourced, and many people are slipping out of the middle class.[2] If the "system" is failing to create jobs for citizens, then it may be time to revisit the question of corporations' responsibility to those it employs.

Moore never comes out and says, "I am going to talk with you about accountability at three levels" or "My film will reveal problems of enforcing accountability within a capitalistic system." The viewer has to make the imaginative leap, filling in the blanks by watching the film critically and asking at each stage, "Why is this scene here?" As Aristotle notes, imagining is the act of making present that which is absent.[3] Before I show the film, I ask the students to try to figure out why Moore has included each particular scene and to take notes as they watch the film. I want them to exercise their imagination by considering possible reasons for Moore's choices before we start teasing out the themes touched upon here. Moore' s film demands this type of critical awareness far more than other films often shown in a business ethics class (e.g., Wall Street, The Smartest Guys in the Room, etc.). He asks and expects members of his audience to abandon their indifference and to pay attention to what is happening in the world around them (as depicted in the film). In that sense, the film is ethically transformative. Moore's pastiche style demands that the viewers themselves become accountable. Those students who engage the film in this critical and responsible manner do have a very active experience and truly are exercising and honing their moral imagination.

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[2] Kerri Miller, "The Psychological Strain Facing the Long-Term Unemployed," discussion with Robert Leahy, Midmorning with Kerri Miller, November 4, 2011, Minnesota Public Radio, http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2011/11/04/midmorning1/.

[3] Aristotle, De Anima.

## Power and Voice

*Roger and Me* can be viewed as Moore's attempt to enforce some measure of corporate accountability by giving voice to lower middle class workers who are increasingly being economically dispossessed. It is no accident that Moore had founded a magazine entitled Michigan Voice. Early in life, Moore apparently arrived at the conclusion that America's consumerist economy cannot long endure if citizens do not have jobs. Lacking wages, they are unable to purchase things. When Moore leaves Flint (prior to the big GM layoffs) to take a job with a San Francisco magazine, he is struck by the large number of cake shops in this city on the coast. People seem to while away the afternoon drinking café lattes. The omnipresent cake shops function as a metaphor for what is potentially wrong with the new American economy: Cake is dessert, not the staff of life. It is a luxury for the well-off who are earning large sums in the knowledge economy. It as though Moore is asking: Where is real life, with real jobs and real food? Not everyone can sit around chatting and reading newspapers all day.

At the beginning of the film, Moore tells us that he had wanted nothing more than to emulate his childhood heroes—Casey Kassem and Bob Eubanks, two men who had escaped from Flint. Yet he is repelled by what he discovers when he makes a break for freedom and relocates to San Francisco. When he refuses to do an exposé of the herbal tea industry and instead puts an unemployed auto worker on the cover of the San Francisco magazine, his editor fires him. Moore promptly returns to Flint. Moore seems driven to make visible the decline of the middle class, a phenomenon people are ignoring. Even as a child, he inchoately felt that "there had to be more to life than eating cake." He was drawn toward issues of political and social justice, claiming to have memorized John F. Kennedy's inaugural address by age six. Moore's film visibly and implicitly takes to heart Kennedy's injunction, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

Even the format of the film is consistent with his project so understood. Most of the film is a series of interviews with people from all walks of life. The local media covered the GM layoffs in a superficial manner. TV stations showed the last car rolling off the assembly line but never followed up to see and show what happened to the tens of thousands of autoworkers who lost their jobs. Moore takes us into the homes of workers who are being evicted from their houses because they can no longer pay the rent. We hear their fear and rage as they are forced to abandon the roofs over the heads and to try (with little or no advance notice) to cobble together some sort of new life. So many people have been driven out of Flint that the recently evicted cannot even find trucks or U-hauls to transport their stuff to another place. We watch them literally being forced out onto the streets. Such scenes are rarely, if ever, shown on the nightly news.

If the adage "out of sight, out of mind" is true, *Roger and Me* qualifies as a sustained attempt to bring the plight of the dispossessed to the front of our minds. Moore motivates our interest in the unemployed by depicting the devastation wrought by the layoffs. We see street after street of abandoned houses. The rats have proliferated in Flint because the city can no longer avoid regular weekly garbage pickup. The local plasma clinic is doing a booming business as individuals sell their life's blood to earn money to survive. Sheriff's Deputy Fred Ross is busy evicting homeowners who can't make their mortgage payments. Having seen such images, we viewers may find it a bit harder ourselves to overlook and dismiss the plight of the poor and homeless.

Moore's film is valuable because the powerful who are at least partly responsible for this plight have no interest whatsoever in highlighting the devastating consequences of their choices. When Moore finally catches up with Roger Smith and asks Smith if he will come to Flint to see what has happened to the workers, Smith dismissively responds that he "has been to Flint." When Moore presses further and tells Smith that he and his crew have just been up in Flint filming former GM workers being evicted from their homes, Smith retorts, "I know nothing about that," angrily adding that "GM did not evict these people from their homes." This answer, while technically true, is at least partly disingenuous. Indirectly, GM did evict these men and women when it shut down its local plants. Smith, though, does not want to entertain and acknowledge any accountability. By showing Smith's response, Moore reveals another aspect of the accountability puzzle: if local media do not confront the powerful, and if the powerful rationalize away any responsibility for harm they may be causing, who will voice the concerns of those who are less powerful?

At one point, when Moore is speaking with a security guard at GM's headquarters about getting in to see Roger Smith, a PR person comes over and takes the guard aside. The two turn their backs on Moore and walk away, leaving him alone. The gesture is so disrespectful that I sometimes hear students suck in their collective breath. At another point, Moore gets into GM's annual shareholder meeting. When Smith asks whether there is anyone who wishes to speak but who has not yet had a turn to do so, Moore goes to the microphone to ask a question. GM management knows who he is. Consequently, before he can ask his inconvenient question, Smith asks for a motion to adjourn. The motion carries. Moore is left awkwardly standing speechless at the now silenced microphone. Smith and another member of the board are chortling with glee at the fast one they pulled on Moore. Moore, though, gets the last laugh. His long range powerful microphones pick up the gloating, private conversation between Smith and his colleague. Through this film, Moore was able to show this attempt at silencing dissent potentially to millions of filmgoers. This vignette shows both how far powerful persons will go to silence opposition and how the underdog can fight back by disclosing that oppressive dynamic at work.

## Use and Control of Language

Use and control of language emerges as another key theme running throughout this film. In whose language can the dispossessed express their concerns? Moore records numerous cases of people manipulating language throughout this film to suit their dubious ends. When Miss Michigan Kaye Lonnie Rae Rafko arrives in Flint for the annual parade, Moore asks her what she thinks about the situation in Flint. All she is willing to say is that she is "for employment." Her comment is utterly vacuous, in part because, as she puts it, this is not yet "my time for an interview" and, in part, because she wishes to be perceived as neutral. To take any strong stance might jeopardize her chances of winning the Miss America title. So she employs language as a shield to ward off any attempt to hold her accountable for her own views or to enlist her in an effort to make others (e.g., GM managers) accountable for their actions.

Sometimes we speak in ways that seem to be responsive but that convey nothing. When asked whether he had ever met Roger Smith in person, Pat Boone says "no." Nonetheless, he is favorably disposed to the GM CEO because Smith is such a "can do" sort of guy. Pol Pot, Senator Joseph McCarthy, and Carrie Nation were "can do" agents as well, but their force of will was not necessarily a positive thing. What matters is not will power but the character of what is done. Are a given agent's actions just or unjust, temperate or intemperate?

Roger Smith is similarly vapid when he gives his annual GM Christmas address. With the choir singing "You better watch out" because "Santa Claus is coming to town," Smith quotes Dickens to support the notion that Christmas is a "total experience." Smith does not tell us what he means by this phrase, but, when Moore cuts to a scene of a Flint family being evicted on Christmas Eve, we do not doubt that it is this family, not Roger Smith, who is undergoing a "total experience." The family's entire existence has just been upended. No experience is good or satisfying simply because it is "total". Moreover, contrary to what Smith is contending in his address, Christmas is not a happy time for everyone. Christmas cheer gets spread only when we are kind to others. Showing compassion requires noticing the plight of others. Meaningless chatter about how wonderful everything is does not encourage mindfulness.

Self-censorship frequently functions to keep our discourse meaningless. Moore films a GM spokesperson who speaks of a "plant closing" only to correct himself: The shuttering of the Flint plant represented merely the "loss of a single product line." This linguistic substitution serves to obscure the effects of GM's actions. A plant closing means that people are out of work and may consequently suffer. The disappearance of a product line, by contrast, sounds neutral and harmless. Products come and go; we do not hear about the employees who are coming and going.

At some level, we all self-censor. When Moore asks one citizen of Flint how she views Roger Smith, she says that she could use some rather "unsavory language about these fat cats." However, since she is "a lady," she won't say what she really thinks in public or on film. From childhood on, we are taught to be polite. Some self-censorship is desirable. Self-censorship becomes a problem, however, to the extent that we refuse to speak truth to power lest we give offense. Moore shows us one way to solve this problem: the woman expresses the depth of her contempt for GM management by alluding to what she is not willing to say aloud. That which ought not to be said thus gets expressed indirectly. The viewer is invited to fill in the blanks.

This filmed scene itself operates as a visual and aural metaphor for the way in which Moore's film speaks to us: it shows us disturbing scenes and asks us to draw our own inferences as to what is necessarily going on beneath the surface because we are self-censoring in order to minimize social conflict; because the forces of power are keeping the truth from emerging; because key players are in denial about the extent of responsibility for harm they have caused; etc. By showing instead of telling, Moore invites us to develop our skills of reading people, agendas, and silences. The viewer is coaxed into being an active interpreter of events, rather than a passive, disengaged spectator.

The film indirectly raises the question of who gets to decide which language is acceptable for us to use. The new Flint Hyatt hosts a Scrabble tournament. One woman explains that she had played the word "partier" but this word is not in the Official Scrabble Word Dictionary. She admonishes us, "Don't ever say you are a partier." At one level, the problem is that the woman does not know how to spell: "Partyer" is in the dictionary. The problem goes still deeper. Spelling is forever in flux. William Shakespeare felt perfectly free to spell English words as he saw fit, varying the spelling of some words from play to play. Why then should we be prohibited from using words as we see fit? Why must everyone regulate their speech in accordance with an "official" dictionary, especially given that dictionaries always lag behind current usage?

Moore himself speaks of "plant closings," refusing to adopt GM's preferred "loss of a product line" reference. Language is a tool of power, and so we need to be mindful about how we speak. Labels are especially powerful. One resident of Flint sells rabbits from her home, advertising rabbits sold either as "Pets or Meat." The moment her rabbits become "meat", the food inspectors enter the picture. They come to her house and inform her that, if she is dressing rabbits, she needs a certain kind of sink, lighting, etc. This woman cannot possibly afford all of these stipulated improvements. If she could, she would not be driven to raise rabbits in order to supplement her monthly Social Security check. How we label things has immense consequences.

Demagogues have long understood the power of labels. The Nazis referred to Jews as "vermin"; Mao contemptuously dismissed "running dog capitalists". Moore explores when labels may or may not be used, by whom and under what circumstances. Bob Eubanks, host of The Newlywed Show, comes to Flint after the layoffs to host a show at the fair. Eubanks is offended when Moore confronts him about his show asking male contestants to comment on the weight of their wives' breasts. Eubanks indignantly insists that he would never ever use the word "breast" on national television. He would say "chest" but never "breast." Given that even the question about "chest" is potentially quite embarrassing, the viewer wonders about Eubanks' moral scruples.

Just as one starts wondering about that point, Moore inserts another startling scene. Moore explains that he was about to apologize to Eubanks for accusing him of using degrading language when Eubanks spontaneously tells an anti-Semitic joke on camera. The exchange is fascinating for several reasons. Eubanks will honor conventional taboos, but he has no qualms about asking demeaning questions. Which new bride would want her husband to be discussing the weight of her "chest" with total strangers on a show beamed around the world? Although Eubanks' entire show pushes the bounds of good taste, he seems to be oblivious of the fact. Since the network makes money on the show, Eubanks' language passes muster as long as it refrains from using "bad" words that might enrage many members of the community.

However, Eubanks delights in telling Moore a foul, anti-Semitic joke. He apparently feels that no one will hold him accountable for such labeling. Perhaps because he is not on the air, he thinks that he does not have to abide by network speech guidelines. Why does he feel that he can speak with immunity? Precisely because Jews historically have lacked political power, they have frequently been targets of vicious verbal slurs such as Eubanks'. The entire exchange emblematically suggests that people without power are easily and victimized by figures who do have wealth, power, and influence. This vignette, like many others, also makes the viewer complicit in the dynamics and tacitly places us upon the hot seat: If we laugh at Eubanks' "joke", are we participating in a degrading activity? If we do not laugh, what should our stance be toward our fellow viewers and classmates who do snicker at the scene?

Moore brilliantly shows how the powerful use language to further obscure the possible harmful consequences of their actions. After the Flint plant closings, the number of convicted criminals soars. Having constructed a new jail, the city fathers throw a party. Couples pay $100 per person to get fingerprinted, photographed, and booked into prison. Guests drink and dance and spend the night in a cell. When asked why he wanted to attend this party, one man responds that he wanted to know what it was like to be "in jail." The partygoers (all of whom that we see are white) can then return home, telling themselves that it is not so bad to be in jail. Of course, these men and women—these partyers—were never really in prison. They could drink alcohol while eating nice food. They had spousal privileges. Their cell doors were unlocked.

In short, these wealthy citizens are far more akin to the prison guards than the actual prisoners soon to be transferred into this new jail. In one especially chilling scene, two women find the guards' supply closet. They dress themselves in riot garb and then flourish their hefty batons, making threatening gestures while saying "Let's party!" Their joy in being guards with the power to beat up others is palpable. They clearly have no visceral sense of what it means to be on the receiving end of a beating, no empathy for their fellow human beings soon to be imprisoned. For them, jail life is quite literally a party.

Given the power of language to characterize and to obscure, one can understand why Moore includes a scene of Flint citizens burning Money magazine. Money ran a special issue declaring Flint, Michigan the "worst city in America" in which to live. Middle class citizens and workers object to this characterization and gather to light a bonfire on which individuals can throw their copy of the magazine. They give speeches in which they discuss why Flint is a great place to live and why they love it so. These small gestures of solidarity signify that these people are not going to let the elite class tell them how or where to live.

When we discuss the film, I ask students to locate some of these inflection points where the language of description itself becomes the issue. I then ask students to write about one of these scenes, attending to their own language when describing what they see and what they believe is its significance. Part of art's power and pleasure lies in its ability to make us see and hear things anew. Art prompts us to wonder whether we have correctly perceived and characterized some particular issue. That ability to step back and reset is critical to objectivity and hence to ethical thinking. This film serves as an excellent resource for developing that crucial reflective ability in students.

## Authority and Representation

Representation and authority are a fourth theme of the film. The two notions are clearly related. Many figures of authority are such by virtue of being representatives of someone or some group. The lawyer represents or embodies the person of the client; this relationship of representation gives the lawyer the authority to speak on behalf of the client. Members of Congress have the authority to legislate for citizens because they represent us. Management is supposed to represent the interests of stockholders and stakeholders. Given that Moore's film examines the question of voice, it should not surprise us that he explicitly and implicitly touches upon the issue of representation.

Moore records Miss Michigan Kaye Rafko going on to win the title "Miss America." That title suggests that she somehow quintessentially stands for or represents the American woman. Her cluelessness about larger social and economic developments makes us wonder, though, how she could possibly represent anyone, much less the totality of American women. To take another case: Owen Bieber, the president of the United Autoworkers, was elected to represent the interests of workers. Yet, when he appears in the Flint parade, he does not show his face before the unemployed autoworkers. He rides in a limousine shielded by darkened windows. When Moore catches up with Bieber, we find that Bieber is dressed exactly like management. He looks and sounds more like Roger Smith than the other workers interviewed by Moore.

The role played by union leadership in the decline of the American automobile industry is complicated, and Moore wisely does not claim in his film to decide the issue. But when an autoworker later tells Moore that union leadership has gotten too close to management and no longer represents the average worker, we entertain the possibility that perhaps the autoworker is speaking the truth. The film enables the viewer to experience in some small measure what the autoworkers themselves are seeing and hearing. Moore invites us to draw our own conclusions.

At a minimum, the film prompts us to consider who, if anyone, has been representing the true interests of blue collar workers in America. What would it mean to know those interests? At one point, Moore films autoworkers cheering as the last truck rolls of the GM Flint assembly line. One autoworker disgustedly observes, "What are they cheering about? They just lost their job." Another workers tells Moore, "Some people know what time it is." The implication is that some workers do not grasp what is happening. That possibility raises another question: Who, if anyone, does know the truth about what is happening? And how do we know whether such a person really is an authority on the matter?

Political representatives, too, come in for scrutiny. The city council seeks to cope with the layoffs by reinventing Flint as the tourism capital of Michigan. They spend $13 million to entice the Hyatt Corporation to open a new hotel in Flint. AutoWorld (which costs $100 million) opens to great fanfare as does Water Street market, an upscale mall. All of these venues close within 2 years of opening due to lack of business. Viewers in whom the film has stirred compassion want to applaud the city council for taking some steps to rebuild the economy of the city. At the same time, the officials' actions seem of dubious value. Flint has long been known as an industrial city. Before spending millions of taxpayer dollars, the representatives should have done some detailed market research and given a lot of careful thought to their plan to get Flint "looking like upper middle class Toronto."

The city manager appears somewhat at sea. He praises the Hyatt hotel merely because it has large plants. No one will drive hundreds of miles to see some greenery inside a hotel! When Moore asks the woman at the tourist kiosk what the number one question tourists ask her, she responds: "Where is the bathroom?" There does not seem to be a lot of tourist interest in Flint and its environs. Nor is there a stable base of consumers to support all of the city's expenditures. As Moore himself documents at the beginning of the film, Flint has shrunk rapidly as individuals who could move did so in search of jobs. The most secure job in Flint belonged to those at the Post Office who were processing change of address forms. Any remaining unemployed autoworkers were unlikely to have much discretionary income to spend on new shoes, a night at the Hyatt, or a spin on AutoWorld's indoor Ferris wheel. Was this money well-spent—i.e., did it really promote the true interests of all people of Flint, or did the campaign serve primarily the moneyed interests of the city?

Toward the end of the film, Moore interviews some workers on the last day before the GM plant employing them is slated to close. In the middle of one interview, a GM self-identified "spokeswoman" elbows the worker aside and asks Moore who he is. When Moore responds that he is an "independent filmmaker," the spokeswoman tells him, "You do not represent anyone." Is that true? Moore is a citizen of Flint. As such, he surely does have an interest in the economic, social, and psychological welfare of members of this community. Moreover, does this woman have the authority or the right to decide who represents whom? Given that she almost certainly would have allowed him access if he had been with a large national network television news station, the real issue seems to be one of power, not of representation.

The same dynamic is on view earlier in the film when Moore tries to schedule an interview with Roger Smith at GM's Detroit headquarters. Without the right credentials, individuals are not allowed to enter. Moore cannot speak to Smith without an appointment. To get an appointment, Moore needs to give his business card to Herb Slaughter, one of GM's public relations personnel. Lacking a business card, Moore hands Slaughter his Chuck E. Cheese pizza discount card. The incongruity of the exchange makes it funny. At a deeper level, though, Moore is again making the point that powerful people control access by establishing the ground rules regarding who is in the "club" and who is not. Since Slaughter does not believe that

Moore represents anyone important (i.e., powerful), he refuses Moore access to the halls of power. By creating a film on his own terms, Moore, in effect, tries to rewrite those rules, making images available that management would rather suppress.

By filming encounters such as these, Moore goes some way toward establishing his bona fides. No one else is giving the laid off workers a chance to speak. By producing and releasing this film, Moore enables the citizens of Flint and the rest of us to see what the powers that be do not want to put on display. Although the spokeswoman hides behind the excuse that this last day is a "private" time within the GM "family," Moore makes her linguistic dodge public and visible. A real "family" does not expel its members or deprive them of a livelihood. GM is doing both, and Moore highlights this fact.

## Duties to Stakeholders, Especially Employees

At various points in the film, Moore suggests that corporations owe special duties to stakeholders with whom it has, what I termed above, an implicit social contract. In GM's case, that would mean the firm had a special duty to try to keep its Flint employees working, given that Flint was the birthplace of GM.

Whether such a duty exists is not clear. Richard DeGeorge has argued that firms have an ethical obligation to minimize the harm their actions do to communities.[4] Corporations locating in a community expect that their employees will have access to basic housing and services. Communities support firms by building schools and access roads and sewer lines; by providing police and fire department service to firms; by granting tax breaks, etc. Communities also come to depend on the tax revenues paid by local firms. For all of these reasons, firms must, DeGeorge argues, seek to minimize harm done to the local community if the firm closes a plant. On the other hand, DeGeorge maintains that "no individual employer has the obligation to employ others, and employers, acting individually, in their own interests, cannot be blamed if collectively they cannot provide work for all who want it. The system is to blame, not individual employers within it."[5]

Moore, however, seems to want to blame GM for the Flint closure. Certainly we see no evidence in the film that GM sought to minimize the deleterious effects of its plant closings. Is there anything that GM could have done to avoid closing the plants in the first place? Or is Pat Boone right when he says "nobody is to blame"? In a capitalistic system, destruction as well as creation of businesses and markets is always occurring. So, Boone implies, workers should simply get over the plant closings, show initiative, and create their own businesses. Moore does

[4] DeGeorge (2010), p. 197.

[5] DeGeorge, pp. 424–425. DeGeorge never states clearly what he means by the "system." Moore would say that the "system" includes linguistic abuse by those in power, various methods corporations have for avoiding accountability, strategies adopted by executives to undermine critics, and so on.

not dismiss entrepreneurism, yet he does not agree that everyone can be the founder of a corporation. Given that we must work in order to survive, and working generally means having a job, Moore appears to think that the autoworkers have a right to a job, and maybe even a right to be employed by the management of GM, especially given the promises that GM made in the past to its employees and the citizens of Flint.

This latter claim is worth considering. Few, if any, business ethicists consider past representations and commitments made by employers when evaluating the ethical acceptability of plant closings. Yet, in many other walks of life, we expect those who make commitments to honor them. Marriage is such a commitment, as are all the learned professions (medicine, law, clergy), which historically have been understood as public pledges or covenants binding professionals to serve potential and actual clients. Thus, although it is true, (1) as Immanuel Kant insisted that "ought" implies "can"; and (2) that GM might not have been able to keep open all of its plants in Flint, Moore may reasonably counter that GM at a minimum owed it to its workers to reinvest in them through retraining.

Hence, the film begins by mocking GM's strategy of exporting jobs to Mexico in order to drive down its labor costs and of using the money saved to diversify into other industries (e.g., Hughes Aircraft). In fact, the investment in Hughes did not prove to be very lucrative. GM departed from its core business (manufacturing automobiles), a departure that frequently proves disastrous for companies. Still more to the point, GM did nothing to retrain its own workers to make them more productive. When labor productivity increases, per unit labor costs go down. It is not necessary, therefore, to move production offshore in order to remain competitive. GM seems not to have even considered this retraining option.

In addition, cutting costs is always an easy step in the short run. But in order to survive, a firm must be able to generate revenues by creating and offering products consumers want to buy. Instead of making a serious effort to come up with radical new designs (e.g., an electric car), GM took the easy way out by off-shoring production. This strategy merely deferred the day of reckoning, a moment that finally arrived when the US government had to bail GM out in 2009. So perhaps Moore is correct to imply that GM's management does deserve to be blamed for adopting such a short-term perspective both with respect to labor and to products.

To put the point slightly differently: There is a reason why some firms do better than others. Management surely does bear some responsibility for a given firm's performance. Management is lavishly compensated, in part because top executives claim to be responsible when their firms do well. They can be considered responsible only if they have the power to initiate key actions and if they have some control over the effects of their chosen actions. Consequently, for GM to blame the "system" for plant closings is somewhat disingenuous. Such talk diminishes responsibility. As old adage has it, "When everyone is responsible, no one is."

Moore wants to keep the pressure on particular individuals (especially American executives) to fulfill their promises. He maintains this pressure by filming especially memorable sequences. He not only shows proliferating rats and home evictions.

He shows us killing on screen. The woman who is selling rabbits as "pets or meat" is eating rabbit meat herself. While she is explaining to Moore why the health officials have sought to shut her down, she brains a rabbit and then skins and disembowels it onscreen. Why is this scene included? Students sometimes interpret the defenseless bunnies as symbolic stand-ins for the relatively powerless auto workers who have had their livelihoods taken away. Although this interpretation has some merit, a deeper and darker reading is possible. Horrified by what the woman is doing, we avert our eyes. Yet we ourselves consume chicken, pork, lamb and other meat that comes from slaughtered animals. Vegetarians eat produce picked, in many cases, by migrant or illegal workers who toil under inhumane conditions. All of us benefit from behavior that we have not cared to examine too closely. In that respect, we are akin to businesspeople and other agents throughout the economy who avert their eyes from the consequences of their behavior.

After skinning the rabbit onscreen, the woman matter of factly says, "Now you know"—i.e., now you see what is really involved both in eating and in making a living. In this way, Moore keeps the pressure not just on management but also on us viewers to think about the duties we have to our fellow human beings. He unsettles us by making us think about the ways in which we may be complicit in and responsible for possible wrongdoing and by highlighting our resistance to considering our actions in detail. Although we may feel like mocking and judging Roger Smith, how different are we really from him? Don't we, too, avert our eyes from inconvenient truths, preferring to leave such matters in the shadows of our consciousness?

## Conclusion

Moore's film is a great resource for teaching business ethics because it raises questions about accountability at the micro-, meso-and macro-levels. Moreover, because it operates aesthetically as a work of art, the film is able to widen the net of accountability to include the viewer. How we react—do we laugh at the anti-Semitic jokes? Do we close our eyes when bunny lady kills the rabbit for her supper?—becomes every bit as important as Roger Smith's deeds and attitudes. In addition, Moore calls attention to many issues (who has voice? Who speaks for whom? Who gets to decide such issues and why?) overlooked by standard business ethics textbooks.

By juxtaposing incongruous scenes and by including footage that initially seems to have no place in a documentary about plant closings, Moore invites the viewer to make an imaginative leap with a view to uniting these disparate elements. If and when students make such a leap, they not only develop their capacity, as Aristotle would say, to perceive relevant particulars. They also become a bit more skilled at zooming or taking a systems view in which apparently unrelated phenomena are seen to bear upon each other.

The film accomplishes all of these things largely implicitly rather than explicitly. Therein lies much of its power and its relevance to the teaching of business ethics. Questions are more likely to touch our hearts and to stay with us if we ask them by, of, and about ourselves. The best art never reduces to a political tract or moralizing sermon. At its most powerful, it shines a light on the human condition and renders ethical darkness visible.

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# Chapter 8
# *Cheat*: Exporting Business Ethics to Theatre Arts

**Craig Dunn and Rich Brown**

**Abstract** Within the Academy and, of course, within the principal business school accrediting body, there has been persistent debate around whether business ethics should be taught as a stand-alone course or rather integrated across the business curriculum. Rare, however, are conversations heading in the direction of integration of business ethics beyond the traditional bounds of the business curriculum and into, for example, theatre arts and vice versa. And yet just this type of collaboration was established when an inter-College alliance was formed to create the devised play *Cheat*, a main stage theatre production for Western Washington University (WWU), in which theatre became the ground and moral theory from business ethics became the figure. The following is a detailed deconstruction of the variety of ways in which business ethics concepts and models informed the creation of *Cheat*, an original play written, designed, produced and performed by undergraduate theatre arts students.

**Keywords** Plays • Cheating • Theory • Practice • Liberal arts

## The Frame: Theory and Pedagogy

Before commencing this rich description, it is worth outlining the several motivations for engaging in the collaboration. The first has to do with extending the reach of business ethics theory and practice. Principally the domain of business programs, there is great benefit to leveraging the investment of faculty in the teaching of business ethics to the academic advantage of non-business students. After all, students

C. Dunn, Ph.D. (✉)
College of Business and Economics, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, USA
e-mail: Craig.Dunn@wwu.edu

R. Brown, Ph.D.
Department of Theatre & Dance, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, USA

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from virtually every scholastic discipline engage in discussion and debate—some thoughtful and some not—around matters of corporate malfeasance. Better to have such conversation informed by solid theory than by mere intuition. The second has to do with better understanding what constitutes effective pedagogy. While much attention has been given to the distinction between visual and auditory learning styles, "little attention has been given to kinesthetic learning" (Tranquillo 2008, p. 1). Kinesthetic learning is one form of active learning and has generally been deployed in those circumstances in which the objective is to acquire a manual skill or refine muscle coordination. However, it has been suggested that at the post-secondary level kinesthetic learning can well serve the objective of "strengthening concepts as well as connecting ideas together," and is thereby "intended to stimulate deep thinking" (Tranquillo 2008, p. 1). What better way to test such an hypothesis than by challenging students who are already well-versed in the mechanical benefits of kinesthetic learning to extend the principles and practices of such learning to the acquisition and application of the most abstract concepts—those of business ethics?

Kinesthetic learning extends upon the construction of compelling metaphor. "[M]etaphorical meaning…denies the well-established distinction between sense and representation"—as does theatre (Ricoeur 1979, p. 149). Within the context of *Cheat*, "the meaning [of business ethics] is not only schematized but let's itself be read *on* the [theatre] image in which it is inverted" (Ricoeur 1979, p. 149). In this same exposition, Ricoeur argues that "imagination and feeling have always been closely linked in classical theories of metaphor" (1979, p. 149). Theatre bears great potential to move the engaged student beyond a purely intellectual understanding of business ethics theory and application: "[t]o *feel*, in the emotional sense of the word, is to make *ours* what has been put at a distance by thought in its objectifying phase… [i]ts function is to abolish the distance between knower and known without canceling the cognitive structure of thought" (Ricoeur 1979, p. 154). In sum, "[a] metaphor is a peremptory invitation to discovery…[w]hat is discoverable are the various allusive ties, or common attributes, between the metaphor and the underlying truth to which it points" (Swanson 1979, p. 163).

So far so good. But to the extent metaphor is "the fundamental form of verbal *conceiving*" (Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, as cited in Sacks 1979, p. i), we are left to establish a meaningful distinction between metaphor and kinesthetic learning. It has been noted that good metaphor incorporates an affective component; kinesthetic learning does this and more by engaging the body as well as the mind. "Kinesthetic activities are a time when students can develop their own personal interpretation of a concept and make connections to other ideas and concepts" (Tranquillo 2008, p. 7). You will find in the detail that follows a sketch of both metaphor as well as kinesthetic learning. The students devising *Cheat* were able to take the theories of business ethics as presented in lecture and discussion, interpret these metaphorically through elements of character, dialogue, narrative, costume, staging and lighting—and then internalize the metaphor and associated learning in creative performance. In so doing they captured the two primary aspects accounting for the power of any metaphor: "the greater the number of allusive ties discovered and the greater the speed or suddenness with which the discoveries are made" (Swanson 1979, p. 163).

## Figure and Ground

This project began with the creation of a new course within the department of theatre for fall term 2008 at WWU—THTR 480: Devising Production (5 credits). The course objective was to research, create, develop, and finally perform an original play for WWU's mainstage theatre season. The 10-week course[1] engaged 18 undergraduate theatre majors, both designers and performers, who were selected through a combination of auditions and interviews to form a devising company. *Devising* is loosely defined as the process of collaboratively creating a new work without a pre-existing scrip wherein the collaborators are also the performers.[2] In the standard theatre model, a single playwright writes the text and then a director casts actors and selects designers to interpret that text, resulting in a theatre production. With devised theatre, however, the collective artists begin without a script. They unfetter themselves by surrendering their traditional, specialized theatrical roles of actors, designers, playwrights, or directors to become theatre *cross-trainers* who start with an idea, *a hunch*, that takes them into a studio space to investigate collaboratively or *unpack* that hunch. A devised piece of theatre can literally start with anything: a painting, a song, a real-life event, a novel to adapt, or in this case an instinct about the rise of cheating in the United States.

Reading David Callahan's *The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead* (2004) a few years earlier sensitized Professor Brown to Callahan's avowals about the causes of cheating in America. With no particular desire to adapt this book for the stage, a latent interest was nonetheless maintained in investigating Callahan's ideas of how and why cheating is on the rise in our culture. This interest led to a need to unpack this hunch with a company of students. *The Cheating Culture* was therefore selected as the source material from which to launch an inquiry into cheating. Interested theatre students were invited to audition for the devising course. In addition to the Callahan book, students enrolled in the course were required to read Sheila Kerrigan's *The Performer's Guide to the Collaborative Process* as well as numerous journal articles about devising. The play would ultimately be successful only as an investigation into the subject of cheating that was coupled with instruction and training about the skills and methodologies of devising.

Devising a new theatre piece consists of five key phases: the research phase, the creation phase, the development phase, the rehearsal phase, and finally the performance phase. The first 5 weeks of the 10-week course were devoted to the research phase. In addition to the ideas in Callahan's book, the students selected their own areas of

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[1] WWU uses the quarter system. This new course was only one quarter, even though the whole project spanned two quarters. Students had an option to enroll in THTR 356: Performance (3 credits) to receive credit for their work developing, rehearsing, and performing the play during winter term—after the fall course had ended.

[2] We say "loosely" because every devising company creates their own method of working based on the subject of investigation and the strengths of the collaborators. Not every company member must perform for it to be a devised piece, but the majority often do. In short, the creators are also the performers.

interest within the realm of cheating. In order to broaden and deepen the students' examination of cheating beyond the bounds of the book, colleagues from across the university were invited to visit the class and give presentations on cheating from their specific disciplinary perspectives—those of sociology, psychology, philosophy, and business ethics. Such instruction took place during regularly scheduled class time.

These presentations illuminated the complexity of cheating to all involved in the devising process. The visiting professors guided the class to scrutinize assumptions and explore deeper dimensions of cheating. Because Callahan's book examines cheating in the business world, most particularly against the backdrop of the rise and collapse of Enron and Arthur Anderson, students were already involved with this area of research. However, as noted in many reviews of Callahan's book, his exploration was devoid of substantive scholarship in business ethics. To remedy this shortcoming a business ethics professor from WWU's College of Business and Economics was invited to visit the theatre classroom. The strength of Professor Dunn's presentation on business ethics and cheating inspired the students, which led to the eventual creation and development of the *business through-line* within the play *Cheat*.

Once the research phase was complete, the devisers moved into the creation phase for the final five weeks of the course.[3] The methodology of creation focused around Moisés Kaufman's process of Moment Work. Kaufman, best known as the artistic director of the New York City-based theatre company Tectonic Theatre Project and co-creator of the play *The Laramie Project*, developed moment work as a means of writing performance from the stage rather than writing text in isolation of a production's context. This technique employs all the elements of the stage (costumes, sound, lights, movement, tempo, breath, surprise, spatial relationships, etc.) to write performance and generate individual *moments*. Kaufman defines moment work as "a method to create and analyze theater from a structuralist (or tectonic) perspective." He further defines a particular *moment* as "a unit of theatrical time that is then juxtaposed with other units to convey meaning" (2001, p. xiv.) Students learned to write with all the elements of the stage, text being only one element of many holding equal importance, in order to create characters, dialogue, and narrative by generating moments. *Cheat*, therefore, did not consist of scenes or acts as in a traditional play script; it rather consisted of 33 individual moments that formed a narrative arc as well as meaning for the audience based on how those moments were structurally ordered.

Devising necessitates hours of experimenting in order to net the best theatrical material. Those 33 moments making it through the final round of edits in order to form a coherent 90-min play were the result of countless moments (and their characters) having been culled during the creation phase. This creation phase produced numerous moments centered on business ethics, resulting in business becoming one of the major *through-lines* within the play. A through-line is connective tissue

[3] However, research still continues during the creation phase. These phases have porous boundaries in the devised process.

within a dramatic work—a mini-narrative within a larger narrative. Ultimately it is the audience members' experience that matters. After weeks of creating a mountain of moments, the company held a public *work-in-progress showing* to discover which characters and narrative elements would captivate the audience and therefore survive into the development phase. The showing's test audience was enthralled by the business through-line, as well as through-lines involving a high school baseball player's journey with steroids and cheating within romantic relationships.

These through-lines became the focus for the development phase that occurred after the devising course had officially terminated at the end of fall term. Per Kaufman's methodology, these through-lines were interwoven moment-by-moment in order to form the structure and generate the meaning from within the play. Breadth had been created. Energies next shifted during winter term to establishing greater depth. This shift was accomplished by each student focusing on their specialized theatrical roles of designers (set, costumes, light, sound), playwrights, actors, and for Professor Brown on directing. Through numerous drafts over 3 weeks a script emerged that was ready to go into a 3-week rehearsal phase. Once the script was in hand, the students collaboratively cast themselves in the roles of *Cheat*. Since they had devised the piece, these students possessed a lucid understanding of which actor could best serve each character and, therefore, how the play could best be structured to enhance the audience experience.[4] From this point forward, a devised theatre process is very similar to a standard theatre model, except that the script continues to go through minor changes during the rehearsal phase. The rehearsal phase transitioned seamlessly into the final phase—performance.

*Cheat* ran for two weeks for ten sold-out performances. Perhaps the biggest success of the whole project could be seen in the make-up of the audience, which consisted mainly of students—but not just students from the theatre department. Because the devising process required reaching out beyond the College of Fine and Performing Arts to enlist the help of professors from other disciplines, the eclectic audience was filled with students from psychology, sociology, philosophy, and, of course, business and economics. Audience members were confronted with the question of why more Americans are doing wrong to get ahead. A significant value-add was achieved for both the College of Fine and Performing Arts as well as the College of Business and Economics as business ethics was exported to theatre arts—and vice versa. Theatre students were exposed to business ethics theory and the business students experienced the theory they had learned in the classroom—all through the performance of dramatic action via characters, dialogue, narrative, costumes, staging and lighting. In many ways, *Cheat* served as a living, breathing case study for business students to analyze and discuss.

[4] Again, this approach is very different from a standard theatre model where actors audition for specific roles within an existing play, often hoping for a lead role that benefits them personally the most. With collective casting in devising, however, the actors are encouraged to put the play's needs above their own. And because devisers birth the play themselves, they often do.

## Overview of Business Through-Line

It is important to reiterate the context: *business* was one of several through-lines that generated 33 moments interwoven to form *Cheat*. The business through-line consisted of ten moments with five characters—the Boss and four interchangeable and replaceable employees within an abstract, office-like setting. The theatrical style of expressionism was invoked for the business through-line, meaning the dramatic action, dialogue and design elements such as costumes, sound, and lighting were non-realistic. Expressionism seeks to dramatize the spiritual awakening and struggle of its protagonists against bourgeois values and established authority. For example, stylized choreography movement was employed to represent the business world abstractly and the characters' emotions within that world; actors wore only black and white base costumes with added costume elements of green or gold, suggesting the armor of gladiators as well as wealth, power, and status within the organizational hierarchy. Characters spoke in a stylized textual form that often named the intent and emotion of their character rather than employing realistic dialogue.[5] Each time a worker was fired, the boss directed another worker to sweep them off the stage with a golden broom, only to have the same actor return in the next business moment and be hired as a new employee within the organization.

This expressionistic world formed the narrative of a boss who is under increasing pressure from his Board of Directors (who are in turn under pressure from their investors) to increase profits through cost minimization to the point at which he finally submits to the Board's demands of "rank and yank."[6] This pressure is funneled directly onto the four employees who then fear for their jobs and begin cheating, scapegoating, and threatening one another to maintain their positions within the organization. The through-line follows Lopez, a female employee, as she rises in power by trampling other employees—to the play's climax as the CEO is figuratively killed and a hostile take-over by order of the new Board of Directors is consummated.

## Business Through-Line: Moment-by-Moment

Each of the ten business moments was created in reaction to research from the Callahan book, outside research, and conferral with Professor Dunn. For the sake of parsimony, six moments that deal most directly with business ethics theory are highlighted.

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[5] For example, the first words spoken by the boss while on the phone to his investors: BOSS: Salutation Investors. Commencement of speech. Outline of current business models, extolment of current state of stock value. Pride in corporate policy. Expression of plan for future profits. Specific details of quarter's model interwoven with colloquial allegory.

[6] The use of *rank and yank* is the most direct connection to Callahan's book from within *Cheat*.

## *Moment 2: Beginning*

This initial moment introduces the audiences to the Boss character. The themes of competition and battle are inherent in cheating, so our student set designer transformed the flexible black-box theatre into a Rome-inspired gladiator coliseum. Standing-room-only platforms for the audience encircled the playing area of the stage. This spatial design put the 100 audience members' heads about 10 feet off the stage floor, so the audience stood and looked down on the characters while surrounding them. However, there was one platform within the circle of audience banks that was reserved as a performance space and that stood 12 feet off the stage floor; it is from this vantage that the audience first meets the Boss character.

In a moment that lasts all of fifteen seconds, the Boss looks directly at the audience and sets the hierarchical frame of values for the business world, one where money trumps social good. Dressed in his full green and gold gladiator costume, he simply states:

> "A team is only as strong as its weakest link." Proverb. "The species that is most fit is the one that is most adaptive to change." Charles Darwin. "Self-management is the key to success in any project." "The point of success is to die with more money than God." Donald Trump. Let the competition begin.

Both social as well as ethical theory are apparent in the set design, costume, lighting, and the script—as brief as it is in this opening scene. Business references are replete with metaphor, a point well chronicled by Gareth Morgan (2007) in his book *Images of Organization*. The last of Morgan's metaphors envisions the "ugly face" of business enterprise as "instruments of domination" (Morgan 2007). The *Cheat* set employs and extends this metaphor by imagining the business world as a Roman arena designed for combat. While the arena served as a venue for contests between man and beast, as well as for public executions, the "most prestigious category of events in the arena…was gladiatorial combat" (Brown 2007). The set of *Cheat* was carefully crafted by students who kept in mind what the notion of Roman action was ultimately about: the "brutal maintenance of social order" (Brown 2007). More than any other theme, the idea of *business as hierarchical cultural structure* permeates *Cheat*. Rules are rigid, and penalties are harsh—though sometimes the apparent rationality of the system yields to the granting of personal favors based on non-rational criteria, such as nepotism. Within this framework, money and power go hand in hand. This concept is conveyed in the costume of the boss/gladiator: green and gold representing wealth with purple representing preeminence of position. More than any other actor in *Cheat*, the humanity of the boss is shrouded in a costume that makes him appear less man than contrivance. The lighting of this moment focused on isolating the Boss on his 12-foot high platform: he's clearly at the top, yet he is alone there.

As noted above, *Cheat* opens with a trite business statement by the Boss: “a team is only as strong as its weakest link.” What will be developed throughout the play is a theme that has the weakest employee continually excised, only to be replaced with another employee, often played by exactly the same actor. This theme was developed following a discussion of the business rhetoric around human resource management, human capital, and human assets. It was noted here that the Kantian ideal that one ought not to treat persons merely as a means to some other end, but rather as ends in and of themselves, is violated by such uses of language. This discarding of one employee in favor of another identical to the first directly parallels the utilitarian logic that ‘human assets’ are substitutable one for another. This text is followed by a reference to evolutionary theory: “the species that is most fit is the one that is most adaptive to change.” There is an ongoing debate within the corporate social responsibility literature as to whether organizational purpose should ‘trump’ personal purpose. The traditional economic view answers an unequivocal ‘yes.’ However, individuals—and the purposes that largely define them—are converted to mere means to the end of fulfilling the mission of the corporate enterprise. Freeman and Gilbert address this matter head-on as they unabashedly swap the traditional economic figure and ground in favor of advocating for personal projects enterprise strategy: “We want our answer to ‘What is a person?’ to allow for the maximum amount of liberty so that persons can pursue their own [work] in a civilized manner…organizations, and other institutions are mere means toward these ends” (1988, p. 160).

The Boss next asserts, “Self-management is the key to success in any project,” a phrase that reinforces the notion that self is to be subordinated to the good of the enterprise. In an interesting twist, the Boss next quotes Donald Trump: “The point of success is to die with more money than God.” Though one could well imagine Trump saying these words, in an ironic twist Trump speaks in the persona of the comic strip character Dilbert. Discussion with the class centered here in part on the tendency of managers to privilege economic calculations above all else. For example, Professor Dunn explained how Ford executives decided to introduce the Pinto to the marketplace without rear bumper modification even after Ford engineers had determined the car had a propensity to explode on rear impact as a result of a design flaw. The differences between social and economic utilitarianism were explored, with the Ford Pinto case providing an illustration of a key management decision having been supported by economic rationale. It was simply cheaper to kill people than to fix the product defect. As Trump is alleged to have said, the almighty dollar trumps all. The final language of this moment—“Let the competition begin”—directly references the words that we imagine rang out at the opening of each day within the gladiator’s arena: Let the games begin. Only this time the words have a decidedly economic overtone.

## *Moment: 10 Investors; Moment 13 Strategy/Meeting; Moment 19: Balloons*

Moment 10 finds the Boss on one of what will turn out to be several conference calls with the organization’s Board of Directors. The CEO/Boss explains the relatively good profits his organization is producing during the recession,[7] but the board members (represented as disembodied voices coming over the theatre’s sound system) pressure the Boss to consider global economic realities and competitors’ tactics of outsourcing. They encourage him to make changes within the company to increase profits as they chant “rank and yank, rank and yank, rank and yank.” *Moment 10* leads to *Moment 13: Strategy/Meeting* as the employees and the Boss prepare for their day of work with ritualized movements culminating in the donning of clear masks and white gloves. Each in turn makes a distinction between who they are in *real life* versus who they have to be while *at work*:

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|---|---|
| COLE: | I’m a single father. People assume a single parent can’t pull their weight, so at the office I wear a ring. |
| JOHNSON: | I got this job because I graduated from Dartmouth.*(Smiles)*My parents are very generous donors. |
| LOPEZ: | On my résumé, I wrote that I held a similar position at a small but competitive firm; that firm does not exist. |
| SMITH: | I work 50 hours a week, but that’s not competitive anymore, so I bill a 60 hour week. |
| BOSS: | When I first came to the company, I slept with my superior to get a promotion, now I’m the superior. |
| ALL: | That’s not who I am, it’s just who I need to be to succeed. That’s the difference between real life…(*Employees put on masks)*… And business. |

In his landmark work *Moral Mazes* (1988), Robert Jackall studied life within bureaucratic organizations. Jackall’s work “treats ethics and morality sociologically,” a characterization reinforcing the distinction between descriptive theory and normative theory. This difference was discussed as the script, sets, lighting, and costumes for *Cheat* were in development. Students here learned that ethics is fundamentally

[7] *Cheat* was performed in January of 2008, just as the recession had officially begun.

about ‘ought’ rather than ‘is’—or as Schwartz puts it, “[w]hile moral philosophy attempted to teach people how they *should* live, what they *should* value, what roles they *should* play in their communities, social science teaches people how they *do* live, what they *do* value, what roles they *do* play in their communities” (1986, p. 17). Throughout the balance of his treatise Jackall documents managerial behavior best termed “moral schizophrenia”—conduct that is decidedly different in a manager’s professional life than in her personal life. Laying the groundwork for his later account, Jackall argues in the preface that “the enduring genius of the organizational form is that it allows individuals to retain bewilderingly diverse private motives and meanings for action as long as they adhere publicly to agreed-upon rules” (p. 6). These understandings were well captured in the masks the employees in *Cheat* donned. Each mask was the same, although given that the masks were clear, each also hinted at the underlying humanity of the worker—a humanity nonetheless decidedly obfuscated by the disguise. The metaphor of the mask was not mere hyperbole; Jackall’s sociological study found that managers “stress the need to exercise iron self-control and to have the ability to mask all emotion and intention behind bland, smiling, and agreeable public faces” (p. 47).

Another aspect of the masks deserves elaboration. Lenses, too, are clear. And lenses serve a particular function: they afford great precision of sight, while others outside the focal zone are blurred or altogether invisible to the observer. It is worth quoting Jackall here: “[T]he manager alert to expediency sees his bureaucratic world *through a lens* that might seem blurred to those outside the corporation and even to some inside who are unable to rid themselves of encumbering perspectives from other areas of their lives…[I]t is a lens, however, that enables him to bring into exact focus the rules and relationships of his immediate world” (1988, p. 133). The distorting influences to which Jackall refers are those related to ethics. Clarity only comes as “managers apply a thoroughly secular, pragmatic, utilitarian calculus even to areas of experience that, in their private lives, they might still consider sacred” (1988, p. 127). Any notion of the workers’ private lives were similarly covered as the actors donned white gloves, providing a veneer of sterility to the office.

As the action continues, after another phone call from the Board of Directors threatening to terminate him, the Boss relents and calls a strategy meeting to announce a new performance-based *rank and yank* policy designed to cut losses and determine which employee will earn the opportunity to work on *the big case*. In the next business moment, *Moment 19: Balloons*, the rank and yank policy takes effect. Responding to the mandate of his Board of Directors, the boss demands increased productivity from each of the employees. Each employee immediately begins a movement sequence at top bodily speed accompanied by quick, circus-like music. On the Boss's cue, "rank and yank," the exhausted employees attempt to blow up balloons that have numbers pre-written on them.[8] As the Boss inspects their numbers, which are indicators of individual productivity, employee Cole realizes that he and employee Johnson both have the number two (2) on their balloons. In a bid to control his own work destiny, Cole pulls a marker out of his pocket and changes the number on his balloon from a two (2) to a three (3) while the Boss is distracted. The Boss congratulates and dismisses the three employees with the highest numbers, then *fires* Johnson by bursting his number two (2) balloon with his pen. Instantly, time changes. The lights shift to red and Johnson slowly collapses to the ground over a period of thirty seconds. During this slow death, the other employees freeze, knowing any of them could have been in Johnson's situation. With a snap of his fingers the Boss then instructs Cole, the employee who had cheated, to sweep the fired employee off the stage.

During script development considerable attention was paid to the nuances of the utilitarian ethic, given the prominence of this perspective within organizational life. The deficiencies of this perspective were delineated. The inadequacy of an approach to ethical decision-making that imagines all cost-benefit variables can be assigned a monetary value was challenged, as was the assumption that goods carrying the same monetary value are thereby equal on all non-monetary dimensions. The *rank and yank* sequence expressed this utilitarian logic. The moment captures not only the reasoning of an objective performance-based evaluation system, but additionally highlights the vagaries of a system that, while appearing neutral, is nonetheless subject to manipulation.

[8] Actors were directed literally to exhaust themselves physically to the point of gasping for breath so the act of inflating their respective balloons became a challenge itself.

More is happening in this moment. For the employee ensconced within a bureaucratic culture, ethics comes to be more about blame than about normative assessments of right and wrong. Blame is not always assigned with regard to merit—or with regard to ethics for that matter. Jackall suggests “[T]he most feared situation is to end up inadvertently in the wrong place at the wrong time and get blamed…[y]et this is exactly what happens in a structure that systematically diffuses responsibility” (1988, p. 86). Diffusion of responsibility introduces not only arbitrariness into the assignment of blame, but so too does the “complete lack of any tracking system to trace responsibility” (Jackall 1988, p. 87). The result is scapegoating. So beyond an introduction to a variety of idealized theories of ethics, theatre students were now confronted with the pragmatic realities of organizational life. One might know the morally right thing to do, but organizational pressures—and perverse incentives—may lead well-intentioned individuals to engage in nefarious acts that even they would find reprehensible in their personal lives. The very title of the play *Cheat* was selected to play on the variety of contexts (and the ways these contexts matter) within which double-dealing can be practiced.

### *Moment 20: David Johnson’s Dream*

This moment follows on the heels of Johnson’s firing. In addition to his role as a worker, Johnson is also the husband character within one of the romantic relationship through-lines. The devisers were interested in examining how Cole’s cheating at work and the unjust consequences of that cheating would affect Johnson’s home-life—which had been nothing but positive up to this point in the play. After Johnson is swept to the side of the stage by Cole the stage picture shifts to an open space and the audience watches Johnson “pick himself up from being fired” and slowly, shamefully walk home. When he arrives, he finds his wife asleep and he himself quickly falls asleep and begins dreaming. His female co-worker Lopez appears in his dream, provocatively dressed, and inflates a phallic shaped balloon.[9] The Boss also appears with a bouquet of balloons with the number two written on them, and the golden broom. As the Boss pops each balloon and shouts "Fired," Lopez hits Johnson with her balloon in a sexually dominant manner. Johnson moans and writhes, waking up his wife, who is clearly concerned about her husband for the first time in the play. From here forward their relationship deteriorates as the stress of unemployment takes its toll on their marriage. By the end of the play the two have entered couple's therapy and appear to be on their way to divorce.

The narrative development outlining the break between professional ethics and personal ethics up to this point in *Cheat* is now called into question. During the initial discussion of ethics, the concept of integrity was elucidated. One important aspect of moral integrity is being integrated—holding coherent ethical values that are expressed consistently across contexts and roles over time (Dunn 2009, p. 109). Integrity is therefore not in evidence when one simultaneously maintains two separate ethical personae, one at work and the other at home. Integrity demands consistency of character, irrespective of context.

Additional discussion shifted to a deeper probing of the sexualization of the workplace—a challenge to the sterile, objective, rational view of bureaucracy put forward by many, including Max Weber himself. This theme, well-articulated by Woods (1993), references the "veneer of asexuality" that attends our vision of an organization—a veneer that "is itself built on masculine, heterosexual principles" (1993, p. 58). By suggesting that "'the abstract, bodiless worker, who occupies the abstract, gender-neutral job, has no sexuality, no emotions, and does not procreate' is in fact a deeply sexualized figure" (1993, p. 58), Woods challenges head-on the idea of organizational neutrality. He goes on to assert that this system of oppression in which masculine attitudes dominate non-masculine (or caring) moralities can

[9] She was also seductively whispering business text such as, "Synergy. Synchronicity. Rank and yank. Inferiority. Increase productivity time."

only be maintained with the assent of the oppressed—otherwise known as a system of *hegemony* (1993, p. 69). Within the setting of *Cheat*, the underclass is not only dominated but, to use Woods' term, "shamed into silence." Workers thereby become complicit in sustaining the source of their shame, "the very system that renders them powerless" (Woods 1993, p. 71). Organizational power is not asexual but rather deeply masculine. Early in the development process the devisers began critically to examine the use of macho, even warlike, business metaphors.

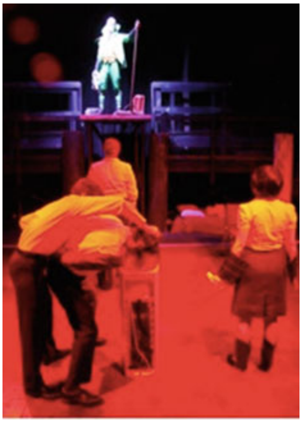
## *Moment 22: Water-Boarding*

This scene finds the same four employees at the work locale, only now the actor who formerly played Johnson has been introduced as the new employee Bateman. The moment begins with the Boss informing the employees that he is upset because: "Company leak within branch. Sharing trade secrets." He demands: "Name required by 5:00 pm. Perpetrator or scapegoat." Once the Boss exits, the new hire Bateman immediately accuses Smith whose head is dunked in the office's water-cooler tank by the other three employees as a means to gain his confession. Smith, in turn, attempts to accuse Lopez. This effort doesn't gain traction so Smith next accuses Cole: "Diversion! Cole. Family ties. Rival business!" This scapegoating works, and all employees drop their attack on Smith and turn against Cole despite his protests: "Fraudulent accusation! Loyalty!" After numerous dunks in the water-cooler tank that increase in duration each time, Cole relents saying what he thinks they want to hear: "Confession! Confession! Admission of wrongdoing. Confirmed bystander of fraud." Smith quickly informs the Boss who unceremoniously announces: "Fired." Lopez and the new employee Bateman hold Cole's head under water until he stops moving. After he collapses to the floor, Bateman sweeps him offstage.[10] The Boss rewards Smith (who is the real perpetrator of the trade secret leak) for whistle-blowing with *the big case*. Ironically, the reward of *the big case* is simply more work.

Scapegoating has an interesting history, one well described by Carmichael (2000). In his exposition of the topic, Carmichael not only sketches the act of scapegoating itself—which has the sins of the Israelites transferred to a blameless and domesticated animal who is then sent into the wasteland to a most certain death—but additionally notes this action "is a means of concealing [Joseph's brothers'] wrongdoing" (2000, p. 172). Long understood within the Judeo-Christian tradition as a foreshadowing of the death of the Messiah, the concept of scapegoating takes on a much more insidious cast as the act comes to be understood as a deliberate assignment of *personal*, as opposed to *communal*, guilt by those who are directly

[10] It's important to recall that the same actor played both Johnson and Bateman, wearing the exact same employee costume of black pants and white shirt. So the audience was watching Bateman sweep off Cole when approximately 25 min. ago that same actor had been swept off the stage as Johnson.

responsible for the sin that is being absolved by the act of scapegoating. This action offers no generalized absolution, but is a Faustian bargain writ in the blood of the innocent. And so it is with *Cheat*. Those who are guilty, who have shared trade secrets, assign the blame to a "*bystander* of fraud." Of further interest is the turn of phrase the theatre students have scripted for the Boss, who is clearly indifferent to exposing either the "*perpetrator* or a *scapegoat*." Either will do. So it is in bureaucratic life. As Jackall learns "One gives credit [or blame]…not necessarily where it is due…but where prudence dictates" (2000, p. 21). So much for justice.



The juxtaposition of the water cooler with water-boarding deserves some brief elaboration. The water cooler has been viewed as a non-work space within the work environment. Workers visit the water cooler not so much to hydrate as to swap quick gossip or share personal tidbits. The water cooler may be viewed as a threat to the alleged impersonal office structure as it provides an intersection at which humanity encounters bureaucracy. The danger is that what is disclosed at the water cooler seeps back into the objective reality of the organizational structure, as it does in *Cheat*. It is thus no accident that the students chose to label this moment using an expression of torture: water-boarding.

## *Moment 27: Tear*

The business through-line moments start to come faster and harder as the play builds to its crescendo. This moment traces Lopez's and Smith's escalating competitiveness as they strive to rise to management positions within the fictional organization. As Bateman and Erickson,[11] the two newest employees, repeat the

[11] This moment begins with Erickson replacing Cole. Again, both characters are played by the same actor wearing the same costume.

*increased productivity* dance, Lopez and Smith physically fight over *the big case*. When the Boss discovers them, he demands an explanation. Lopez wins the dispute by offering the Boss a "sexual favor" coupled with a "reminder of ethnicity quotient." The Boss then promotes Lopez to management and offers her a gladiator leather costume piece to add to her base costume. He instructs Lopez to "rank and yank." Lopez takes a contract out of *the big case* and quickly rips it in half as she cries: "Fired!" This exclamation causes Smith to collapse to the floor. The Boss hands Lopez the golden broom, and she sweeps Smith off the stage.

In the closing paragraph of *The Battle for Human Nature*, Schwartz points to a solid conclusion grounded in the preceding 300-plus pages of argument:

> Rational economic man as a reflection of human nature is a fiction. It is a modern invention, a new path. But it is a powerful fiction. And it becomes less and less a fiction as more and more of our institutions get pervaded by its assumptions and other paths are closed. (1986, p. 325)

The theatrical moment under consideration imagines two workers—among many workers—driven by competitiveness to do whatever it takes to advance within the organization. During the preliminary discussions of ethics, the devising students came to understand that the worker performance imperative is inextricably bound to the social architecture within which work is embedded. It is for this reason so much play was given to the role of the Board of Directors whose disembodied voices are channeled through the Boss. To the extent the Board shares Friedman's (1970) belief that the responsibility of the business enterprise is to increase profits, managers structure competitive reward systems, incentivizing workers to attend only to performance-related outcomes—often at the expense of social and/or moral good.

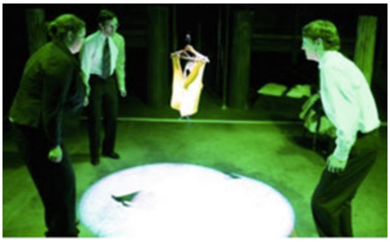
However, such objective performance measures are subject to challenge when the personal collides with the impersonal. Both sexual favors and ethnicity quotients refer not to the supposed objective realities of the workplace but rather hearken to the most intensely intimate dimensions of personhood. The lesson here is that for all the supposed trappings of organizational rationality, neutrality yields all too easily to expressions of personal pleasure or incarnations of legal duty. At the end of the day, after all, managers are not mere actors but rather living, breathing human beings.

When Lopez is promoted to manager she receives a new costume piece made of leather that is similar to the Boss's gladiator-inspired forearm guards. As the moment progresses she is thereby subtlety but visibly transformed from a submissive woman to a dominatrix. Lopez embraces the trappings of masculinity in her relentless pursuit of advancement. For decades now organizational researchers have observed that "traits such as aggression, dominance, and achievement orientation, which have been attributed to male managers, are more likely to be associated with both men and women who have attained managerial positions" (Brenner et al. 1989, p. 663). One significant cost of getting ahead in business is renouncing femininity—along with significant associated ethical attributes such as caring.

## *Moment 31: Bonus*

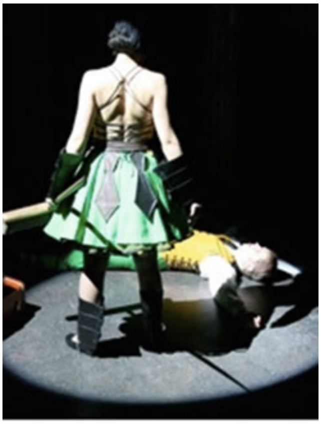
Here O'Reilly is hired to replace Smith. O'Reilly is played by the same actor who formerly played Smith. It quickly becomes apparent that O'Reilly's position is the result of a nepotistic hire. The Boss states: "O'Reilly. Congenial remarks lacking formality. Casual question regarding mutual cousin's health. Congratulations on successful recruitment. Polite request to begin work." When Lopez questions the Boss's hiring choice, he reprimands her, assigns her mandatory over-time, and denies her consideration for future bonus opportunities. He then publicly announces *the bonus*—a gold vest costume piece identical to his own. O'Reilly, Bateman, and Erickson immediately begin an *increased productivity* movement sequence as they watch the vest being lowered from the stage's lighting grid overhead. Lopez is forced to watch the competition from her seat. The three employees increase their tempo and scale of movements until they literally exhaust themselves and collapse panting on the ground. The Boss then nonchalantly saunters onstage while whistling and claims the bonus vest for himself, putting it on over the gold vest he already wears.

Why *Cheat*? Whether in games, or business, or relationships the answer is the same: to gain an advantage one does not, on the basis of one's own merit, deserve. Cheat is both a verb, used with or without an object, and a noun, used to describe the perpetrator of cheating. In this moment, the Boss takes as his own something earned by the workers. He thereby both cheats and is a cheat. This cheating of the worst kind for it is the Boss himself who has initiated what the workers have accepted as an objective, rational, performance-based reward scheme, only to step in once they have exhausted themselves in the quest for recompense. This vest duplicates the one he already possesses. His cavalier attitude—whistling while making his move—adds insult to an already profound injury. All is not as it seems.



## *Moment 33: Gladiators*

Moment 33 concludes the business through-line and the entire play. Dressed in full gladiator gear including a headdress helmet with plumage made of dollar bills and telephone receiver nunchucks, the Boss enters the playing area followed by Bateman (who is swinging a computer mouse by its cord) and O'Reilly (who has computer keyboards attached to her forearms like shields). All are prepared for a corporate take-over battle. Lopez, now also in full gladiator costume and wielding the golden broom, enters and reports: "Investors demand rebranding. Request mandatory CEO resignation. Board approved new leadership." With a slice of the golden broom handle, she eliminates Bateman, then O'Reilly, and finally the Boss—thus taking control of the organization. The play ends with a bewildered Erickson, who has not witnessed the coup, entering and surveying the carnage. Lopez informs him "Hostile takeover. New employee required. Begin at middle management." But Erickson removes his clear business mask, sets it at Lopez's feet and exits, leaving Lopez alone at the top of her corporate ladder.



This moment would seem to be Lopez's triumph…but it is not. What rivets the audience's attention is the action of Erickson as he rejects success—indicated by the removal of the mask—in favor of personal integrity—captured by the exit. From the merely pragmatic point of view, perhaps a common catchphrase asked of one who cheats in a relationship was ringing in his ears: if she would cheat *with* me, what makes me think she would not cheat *on* me?

There is much deeper import here, the moment being reminiscent of the closing words of *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*. Following a compelling description of a society characterized by utilitarian ideals, Ursula LeGuin (1975/2000) writes:

> Each alone, they go west or north, towards the mountains. They go on. They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back. The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas.

A reference to this story in the initial planning stages of *Cheat* gave rise to this closing moment of the play.

The field of nursing offers a concept germane to, but seldom mentioned in, organizational literature writ broadly—the notion of *moral distress*. Unlike a moral dilemma, in which competing options make deciding on the proper course of action perplexing, moral distress refers to those instances in which a worker "knows the morally right course of action to take, but institutional structure and conflicts with other co-workers create obstacles" (Jameston 1993, p. 542). The challenge is settling on a method of coping effectively, which sometimes means—as in the case of Erickson—taking flight. Such a response is ultimately the strongest of indictments against an organizational structure that has become so perverse as to make life within its bounds utterly unmanageable.

## Critical Success Factors

There are several practical considerations that contributed to the success of this learning venture. The first was that the faculty involved both got along with and respected one another. They were additionally willing to devote the time to making the learning project a success, even absent full compensation. This was undergirded with a commitment to interdisciplinary, supported by a university culture that values boundary spanning. This boundary spanning was not only evident in the eagerness of faculty to collaborate, but in the willingness to take risks—to surrender learning to the students. Pragmatically, it was enormously beneficial to have had a devising course already a part of the university curriculum. This again points to university culture, in this case one that places trust in faculty to successfully articulate the goals and parameters of a course that seems by its very nature to defy structure, supports the expenditure of faculty political capital to navigate the course approval bureaucracy, and entrusts faculty to market an innovative course product to what might have proven a skeptical customer base.

## The Frame: Theory and Pedagogy Redux

At the conclusion of this endeavor it is difficult to determine the point at which business ethics theory leaves off and kinesthetic learning picks up. In drafting the script for *Cheat*, theatre students relied heavily on ethical theory as presented in class by a business ethics professional. However, in interpreting ethical theory through characters, dialogue, narrative, costumes, staging and lighting these students not only encapsulated but more importantly extended upon such theory. The process was neither fully deductive nor fully inductive. Kinesthetic learning occurred in the actual performance of the play. Through the very enactment of the devised piece learners came to a more complete understanding of business ethics. This appreciation was then used to refine the performance in all its dimensions—but this was of greater import for the audience than for the devisers, since understanding had already been enhanced for the latter through the very activity of kinesthetic learning. In the final analysis it was difficult to determine which dimensions of *Cheat* represented deliberate efforts to breathe life into abstract theory, and which dimensions of *Cheat* had emerged through enlightenment resulting from the physicality of the performance itself.

Tranquillo accurately notes "the degree to which physical activity is present in the classroom appears to drop to nearly zero as students progress from primary to secondary to post-secondary school" (2008, p. 1). To the extent "both active and reflective elements are involved and tightly integrated" (Tranquillo 2008, p. 1), this loss of corporeal movement within the educational context diminishes the university student's acquisition of abstract notions, such as those of business ethics. To remedy this deficiency Tranquillo suggests five elements to be considered in the design of a successful activity: (1) Identifying the objective; (2) Rules to simulate the activity; (3) Logistics; (4) Post-processing, and (5) Closing (2008, p. 4). Couple this with the twin observations that "[m]ost students only understand a concept in the context in which it was introduced by the instructor," and "only a few connections may be made by the instructor between the current topic and other course topics," and the prescription becomes clear: to be effective faculty must provide students the occasion to extend their personal apprehension of nonconcrete concepts (Tranquillo 2008, p. 7). One of the best ways to do this is through employing the techniques of devising—even to such theoretical constructs as business ethics.

The ability to integrate kinesthetic learning into the business ethics curriculum is only limited by the imagination of the instructor. Brainstorming, which in part involves suspending judgment of ideas, might be useful here. Imagine a discussion regarding utilitarianism, as expressed through cost-benefit analysis, taking place in the classroom. Students must identify all the categories of costs and benefits appropriate to the issue at hand and then specify these in monetary terms. Risk appraisal is also calculated. In the front of the room is a large balance scale. When the analysis is complete, students place money—say bricks masquerading as gold ingots, each with a purported value of $1 M—on the appropriate pan of the weighting platform. The scale's beam will indicate whether costs outweigh benefits.

Brainstorm some more. The scale is now a huge teeter-totter, each side able to accommodate the entire class. Students have been debating the ethics of child labor, with some concluding it to be morally justified as a means to economic development and others concluding it to be morally reprehensible because it violates basic human rights. The time for commitment to a decision has arrived and students are instructed to make their stand on the matter of child labor by joining one or the other end of the teeter-totter. One by one students stream to the front of the room and position themselves on the teeter-totter. Since there is no reason to believe that individual student weight is systematically related to a position on this issue there is no need to standardize weight across students. The fulcrum does its job, and the will of the majority is revealed by the slope of the beam. Now imagine you are on the 'losing' end of the teeter-totter and you are lifted off the ground. You are convinced you are on the right side of this issue. And you are literally left high-and-dry as you hang suspended in mid-air. The sense of helplessness is palpable in ways not possible had not the principles of kinesthetic learning been harnessed to drive home the despair felt by those who find themselves ineffective in persuading others to what is honestly believed to be the right point of view. Now moral distress is understood viscerally, through the body, as well as intellectually.

Use metaphor to brainstorm some more. An instructor might assign Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (2001) as a course reading related to the increasing disparity of wealth between rich and poor in capitalist societies. But as an extension to this, require students to replicate for themselves the experience of working for poverty-level wages. An instructor might assign John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (1939/1992) as a course reading related to the dominance of corporate power in America. But as an extension to this, require students to replicate for themselves the experience of being displaced from all that is both familiar and a source of livelihood. An instructor might assign Ursula LeGuin's *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* as a course reading outlining the deficiencies of a society based solely on utilitarian ideals. But as an extension to this, require students to replicate for themselves the experience of privilege—and the associated hubris—which should be (but is not) all too familiar to them.

## Conclusion

This is a call for an interdisciplinary kinesthetic approach to higher education. The space between and overlap within business ethics and theatre forms fertile ground for enhancing learning, particularly for student artists and student audience members within the walls of the university. The collaboration between theatre and business ethics outlined herein opened a door for the student devisers. Most had never heard of the theories presented by Professor Dunn, so the challenge to generate performance based on those concepts posed a formidable challenge. Yet as these theatre artists transformed business ethics theory into playable actions for the stage the depth of their theoretical understanding was clearly demonstrated. The student devisers who created the business through-line for *Cheat* not only digested complicated business ethics theory, they synthesized it and presented it effectively to an audience through characters, dialogue, narrative, costumes, staging and lighting. In numerous instances, they spontaneously made critical connections on their own between business ethics theory and each element of the theatre production.

*Cheat* additionally benefitted the numerous business students in the audience. They were afforded an opportunity to see the theories they had discussed in class come to life as they shared the same physical space with living, breathing characters. Seeing the play also created a shared language among those business students that they could reference during future class discussions—much like case studies in the more traditional classroom setting. Business students could agree or disagree with character dialogue, actions and interpretations; they had to go through a critical process of analysis and synthesis of ethical theory in order to argue their critique of the play within their business classes. Regrettably a joint talk-back session with the theatre devising students and business students did not occur. As future collaborations are executed, this element will most definitely be included.

Beyond the valuable depth of learning for students, the two educators involved in this project gained a deeper appreciation for cross-college collaboration and dynamic participation with another colleague's research. The methodologies and praxis from both disciplines informed the thinking of each professor about his own discipline, which will certainly lead to more *exporting* in the future.

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# Part IV
# Reform for More Enriched Lives

# Chapter 9
# Wisdom and Responsible Leadership: Aesthetic Sensibility, Moral Imagination, and Systems Thinking

**Sandra Waddock**

**Abstract** The world needs wise leaders, but wisdom is clearly in short supply these days if the state of the world is any evidence. Just think of climate change, ecological damages done by modern industrial and agricultural practices, and collapsing and unfair mortgage and financial markets, not to mention the growing gap between rich and poor, as examples. But generally, the need for *wisdom* in leaders and managers, which is defined by Ackoff (*Reflections* 1(1): 14–24, 1999) as the capacity to think through the (short and long-term) consequences of actions, is under-appreciated. Using as a basis the argument that wisdom exists when three components—moral imagination (the good), systems understanding (the true), and aesthetic sensibility (the beautiful) are present (Waddock, *Journal of Business Ethics Education* 7: 177–196, 2010), I explore the implications of this definition for teaching future leaders to be both wise and ethical in their decision making and actions.

**Keywords** Wisdom • Moral imagination • Systems • Aesthetics • Leadership

## Introduction

Wise men, wise women—wise people who can make considered decisions with the greater good firmly kept in mind, are in short supply. Yet as our damaged world attests, they are needed more than ever. Today the world needs responsible leaders with the capacity that Ackoff defined as wisdom to think and "see" through the consequences of actions, not just knowledge or risk-taking ability (Ackoff 1999). To this capacity, we add a sense of equity with a long-term, indeed even a planetary, perspective that takes many needs and interests of the Earth and its other living

S. Waddock, DBA (✉)
Carroll School of Management, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA
e-mail: sandra.waddock@bc.edu

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beings into consideration, as well as an appreciation of the system as a whole, including its design elements of human-created systems. Still, all we need to do is look around to see plenty of evidence that wisdom—and responsible leadership—is in rather short supply these days.

Just think of the state of the world, bringing into consideration issues like climate change, the ecological damages done by modern industrial and agricultural practices, the pervasive evidence of hunger in some parts of the world combined with a growing obesity epidemic in others that is linked to what and how we eat. Consider collapsing state and national budgets, and unfair and unethical mortgage practices, extraordinary rates of housing foreclosure, and a financial system that continues to make our financial markets into little more than a global gambling casino for the wealthy at the expense of the poor, not to mention the growing gap between rich and poor. The manifold issues facing societies and the planet today offer ample evidence of the lack of wisdom among those who lead today in business or in other realms.

Generally, the need for *wisdom* in leaders and managers is vastly under-appreciated in management research and teaching, as well as practice. One of the most notable theories of wisdom, the 'balance theory of wisdom' offered by Sternberg (1998, 2001, 2004), clearly links wisdom to decisions made in the interest not of the self but of the common—the greater good. Unfortunately, most management writing, even about leadership and responsibility, is silent on the topic of wisdom. This lack of appreciation and understanding of the components of wisdom and particularly how to educate for wisdom is problematic in our increasingly complex, over-populated, and interconnected world. In the 'real' world, it is relatively easy to demonstrate the *need* for greater wisdom—if not its practice.

Further, far too little consideration is given to how or even if wise and responsible leaders can be developed (though see Boal and Hooijberg 2001; McKenna et al. 2009)—that is, whether teaching for wisdom is even possible, and, if so, what it would take to do so. Using as the foundation an argument that wisdom exists when three foundational elements of philosophy—the good, the true, and the beautiful—discussed here as moral imagination (the good), systems understanding (the true), and aesthetic sensibility (the beautiful), are integrated in a person (see Waddock 2010), I will explore what wisdom means and briefly examine some of the implications of that definition for learning.

## What Is Wisdom?

Wise people can be found in all cultures and all regions of the world. Wise people tend to have a broad perspective on what is important rather than focusing more narrowly, have a capacity to take the perspectives of others, and see the linkages or connections among people, ideas, issues, and situation in ways that others do not. Wisdom has many definitions and there is considerable controversy around its meaning. Here, using as a foundation the much-sought concepts of the good, the true, and the beautiful, I will define wisdom as:

> Wisdom is the capacity to integrate three capabilities—moral imagination (the good), systems understanding (the true), and aesthetic sensibility (the beautiful) into (future-oriented) actions and decisions focused on the greater good.

This definition of wisdom argues that wisdom is associated with the capacity to integrate what philosophers call the good, the true, and the beautiful into decisions and actions. Below I will briefly illustrate how this definition builds on and integrates key definitions already extant, while incorporating the philosopher's quest to find, define, and integrate 'the good, the true, and the beautiful' as core elements of wisdom (see Koehn and Elm, this book for an integration of the ideas aesthetics and ethics, which we can extend to consideration of responsible leadership).

Using ancient philosophers three part mind, defined as feeling, doing, and thinking, Birren and Fisher claim that 'Wisdom is the *integration of the affective, conative, and cognitive* aspects of human abilities in response to life's tasks and problems' (Birren and Fisher 1990, p. 326). Conative indicates the capability of acting or striving, which is inherent in my definition because wisdom is associated with decisions and actions (which could be, for example, giving advice). The term affective suggests that emotion needs to included in definitions of wisdom, while the cognitive element of wisdom here is encompassed by systems understanding. But the aesthetic component is still largely missing in Birren and Fisher's definition, though it may conceivably be subsumed under affective aspects.

The definition offered above further builds on McKee and Barber's (1999, p. 156) notion that 'Seeing through illusion [is] the essence of wisdom.' Here and elsewhere (Waddock 2010), I argue for the primacy of "seeing" in wisdom. By that I mean "seeing without blinders," the title of a paper by Bazerman and Clugh (2006), without "motivated blindness" to ethical issues (Bazerman and Tenbrunsel 2011), or, positively stated, by seeing as accurately as possible in any situation and in multiple domains. Such accurate seeing is fundamental to the capacity to be wise—and is associated with an integration of the three core elements of wisdom—or the good, true, and beautiful as complex and interactive guiding factors for decisions and actions in the person who is wise.

Wisdom, of course, does have elements associated with intelligence (defined by Birren and Fisher as cognitive aspects), as well as encompassing emotional issues and moral reasoning. Building on these attributes, I would add in the need to consider aesthetics in defining wisdom (c.f., Sternberg 1998). Thus, wisdom has core elements of knowledge or knowing, which Aristotle termed *Sophia*. But wisdom, according to Aristotle, also has an important practical side, in that it is demonstrated in the (good) outcomes of actions and decisions, or what Aristotle termed practical wisdom or *Phronesis* (Aristotle undated), which is associated with conative aspect of wisdom offered by Birren and Fisher (1990). Additionally, wisdom incorporates aspects beyond day-to-day knowledge to integrate, as McKenna et al. suggest, "the rational and the transcendent, the prosaic and higher virtues, the short- and long-terms, the contingent and the absolute, and the self and the collective. Moreover, wisdom accepts the complex, cuts through ambiguity, and derives its energy from the tensions and uncertainties of a complex world," and hence been linked to not just any leadership, but particularly to leadership that is authentic (McKenna et al. 2009, p. 185). These aspects are reflected in what I am terming aesthetic sensibility (see also Adler 2006).

The inclusion of an orientation toward the common good rather than simple self-interest is a core element of the "balance theory of wisdom," developed by Sternberg's (1998, 2001, 2004). According to Sternberg, "wisdom is defined as the application of tacit as well as explicit knowledge as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good through a balance among (1) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, and (c) extra personal interests over the (a) short term and (b) long term to achieve a balanced among (a) adaptation to existing environments, (b) shaping of existing environments, and (c) selection of new environments" (Sternberg 2001, p. 231). Note in this definition the action- or practice-oriented component, similar to what Aristotle called practical wisdom (phronesis) in the *Nicomachaen Ethics*, the incorporation of the common good as the fundamental goal, and the need for balance as to the orientation of the common good (internal, personal, or outside the person, as to time frame, and orientation toward change that effects a "common good"). Note also the future-orientation, as in Ackoff's (1999) definition of wisdom as the ability to see the consequences of one's actions.

Underlying all of these definitions of wisdom is, I believe, the capacity to "see," that is, to witness the reality of situations as accurately as possible—and to do that through multiple lenses. In my view and minimally, these lenses are moral, systemic, and aesthetic. As Sternberg's notions indicate, these elements need to be in some degree of balance with each other, and they are obviously all linked together to some degree. Underpinning the various elements that constitute wisdom in multiple definitions, including, Ackoff's, is the centrality of the ability to see the consequences of decisions as much and as accurately as feasible. Obviously, the capacity to "see" reasonably accurately clearly does not *guarantee* truth (Werhane 2010) (whatever "truth" might be). Still, the definition offered above suggests that seeing situations and foreseeing consequences reasonably accurately in given contexts is a holistic approach to ensure that the three core domains of moral imagination, systems understanding, and aesthetics (respectively, the good, the true, and the beautiful) are integrated and balanced appropriately for the situation.

Further supporting the three elements of wisdom that I have offered in the definition above, Howard Gardner, the famous psychologist of intelligences, argued that the critical content of education should encompass three concerns: "There is the realm of *truth*—and its underside, what is false or indeterminable. There is the realm of *beauty*—and its absence in experiences or objects that are ugly or kitschy. And there is the realm of *morality*—what we consider to be good, and what we consider to be evil" (Gardner 1999, p. 2). Seeing (reasonably) accurately in these three key domains and balancing the considerations that these perspectives raise at least offers the *possibility* for making wise decisions and actions, particularly when the greater good is kept in mind. As Sternberg's and my definitions both imply, a key to wisdom lies in balancing various inputs effectively—not necessarily equally, but as the particular situation demands. Accuracy of seeing, despite that "reality" (whatever that might be) may never be mapped or conceived fully adequately (Weick 1992), is clearly missing if the perspective is biased, too limited, or too unfocused to take into account necessary inputs, determine their relatively importance, and made a decision or take an action that gives relevant consideration to each of them.

## Moral Imagination

Moral imagination is "the ability in particular circumstances to discover and evaluate possibilities not merely determined by that circumstance, or limited by its operative mental models, or merely framed by a set of rules or rule-governed concerns" (Werhane 1999, p. 93).

Moral imagination relates to the kind of moral reasoning that Kohlberg (1973, 1976) and Gilligan (1982) studied but is broader in scope, applying even when particular ethical issues are not at play (Sternberg 2004). As an element of wisdom, moral imagination allows for the consideration of ethical issues in decisions and actions, which is necessary if the common good or greater good is to be incorporated. Moral imagination incorporates capacities for self-reflection, disengagement and awareness of the situation, script or mental model in play, capacity to imagine new possibilities, and the need to evaluate what is going on morally (Werhane 1999, 2002). These capabilities are enhanced by mindfulness practices, which have been empirically demonstrated to improve managers' awareness of responsibility issues (Crilly et al. 2008).

Abowitz links seeing and moral imagination, stating, "Moral perception is our ability to see and comprehend a moral situation encountered in experience. The moral imagination is our capacity to think of alternatives, to interpret situations beyond what is available to be known with certainty, and to formulate notions and ideas of ourselves and our worlds beyond what we currently experience or know as reality" (Abowitz 2007, p. 288). Importantly, moral imagination means having the ability to envision (see) new possibilities in a situation and evaluate them through a moral lens, weighing them against those possibilities (Werhane 1999).

Fostering moral imagination, then, means that these capacities for reflective practice and perspective-taking in leaders need to be developed and honed, especially if they are part of what it means to be wise. Importantly, moral imagination necessitates raising awareness that managerial or leadership contexts, decisions, and actions inherently have moral implications that need to be taken into account—but are often overlooked because of what Bird and Waters (1989) called the "moral muteness of managers." Moral muteness is the inability of managers to 'see' or raise ethical issues in the context of organizations or their jobs. Moral imagination needs to be developed to overcome this tendency toward muteness or even 'blinders' to ethical considerations (Bazerman and Chugh 2006) on the part of leaders and managers. Consideration of what foundational principles in enterprises are or might be (e.g., Waddock 2004)—or what Donaldson and Dunfee (1999) called hypernorms, universal values accepted in all (or most cultures), can potentially help bring out these moral considerations and enhance leaders' ability to see them in context.

## Systems Understanding

Moral imagination alone, however, is insufficient to generate wisdom, because wisdom also relies on a realistic assessment of the situation (c.f., Senge 1990, 2006), and as will be argued below, some degree of aesthetic appreciation for the situation as well. The capacity to see and understand the system dynamics and implications of those dynamics is directly analogous to Ackoff's (1999) definition of wisdom as the ability to see the consequences of one's actions. There needs to be a sufficient (probably never perfect) understanding of systemic dynamics that what is likely to happen can be foreseen. Possibly, we could argue, the better such understanding is, the "wiser" are decisions and actions likely to be in any given situation where good intent exists, there is likely to be an orientation toward the common good (Sternberg 1998, 2004).

Tacit knowledge is what Sternberg calls the "core" of wisdom, is a capacity for "knowing how" rather than "knowing that," is always situational (Sternberg 1998), and is inherently based on a realistic assessment of the situation which Senge (1990, 2006) has termed systems thinking or here, systems understanding. Like tacit knowledge, systems understanding is inherently based on experience—and the ability to made good yet practical decisions, that which Aristotle called *phronesis*. Werhane (2002) makes a clear link between moral imagination and systems thinking, defining systems thinking as "conceiving the system as a whole with interdependent elements, subsystems, and networks of relationships and patterns of interaction" (Werhane 2008, p. 36).

Wisdom's analytical thinking involves "metacognition," defining problems, formulating strategies to solve them, allocating resources, while balancing different types of interest to seek the common good (Sternberg 2001, p. 233). Such metacognition, which incorporates what Wilber (1995) terms a multi-perspectival capacity—the capacity to incorporate multiple points of view into one's understanding simultaneously—is available to people who have developed to what Kolhberg (1973, 1976) and Gilligan (1982) term post-conventional levels of development. Because of its relationship to a realistic assessment of any situation and its ability to incorporate multiple perspectives—even when they differ, systems understanding seems essential to the development of wisdom.

Cabrera and colleagues point out that systems thinking (or systems understanding) needs to combine with "vigorous problem solving efforts," which is of course the conative or action element of wisdom, and be '*informed by a systems thinking perspective*' (italics in original) to uncover solutions to problems in complex domains (Cabrera et al. 2008, p. 300). Inherently multi-level and interdisciplinary in scope, systems thinking—and its product, understanding—attempt to somehow balance the focus on the whole with a focus on the parts of a complex system in ways that recognize conceptual patterns (with both patterns and conceptual being core to the idea of systems thinking) (Cabrera et al. 2008). These authors also note that there are four fundamental patterns associated with systems thinking—the ability to make distinctions (e.g., between self and other); the existence of a system (i.e., what some call a holon, something consisting of both parts and a whole); recognition of relationship(s) within the system (e.g., between cause and effect);

and differing perspective (e.g., between subject and object) (Cabrera et al. 2008, pp. 304–305). The use of distinctions, systems, relationships, and perspective is what Cabrera et al. (2008) call the DSRP approach to systems thinking. DSRP provides a framework for thinking about the types of skills needed to develop better systems understanding.

## Aesthetic Sensibility

The third element of wisdom as defined above is aesthetic sensibility or the ability to see the design and aesthetic implications of a situation, decision, or situation. Here I use the term aesthetic in two of the meanings posed by Koehn and Elm (introduction, this book): aesthetic sensibility has to do with what is perceived or sensed from witnessing situations, events, decisions and it has to do with ideas, decisions, and designs that are sensually pleasing. It is this capacity that seems to be missing from most definitions of wisdom, yet it seems integral to a holistic understanding of wisdom. For example, in articulating wisdom principles for leadership, McKenna et al. (2009, pp. 178–181) note that "not only are wise leaders articulate, but that they understand the aesthetic dimension of their work and see the intrinsic personal social rewards of contributing to the good life" (McKenna et al. 2009, p. 180), which is the capacity that I have termed aesthetic sensibility.

Wisdom frequently involves creative (i.e., artistic) responses to a situation or problem according to Sternberg (2001). Further, John Dewey (1980) noted in *Art as Experience* that there is an aesthetic quality to some aspects of life that frequently goes unappreciated as "art," because art is too often considered something separate from daily life and to be accessible only at a distance. In opposition to this typical perception of art, Dewey claims that art is integrally linked to the *experience* of things—of life itself. Taking this perspective, certainly experiences of actions, ideas, or solutions seen as wise are often also seen as beautiful. The "beauty" of wisdom exists because wise actions and decisions bring together core elements of what constitutes art: balance and harmony combined with rhythm, an equilibrium that comes from the resolution of tension, order, and coherence (Dewey 1980) into a creative, new, or somehow inspired intuition or approach to dealing with whatever situation is at hand.

Design features of systems and solutions can thus engender an emotionally-based aesthetic response. How often do we respond, "That's beautiful," to an action or decision taken that results in a better (i.e., wiser) solution than might have been previously envisioned. Like such wise decisions or actions, much of art is actually about "seeing" the world in new ways. Conversely, much of wisdom is also about seeing new solutions or courses of action in situations, which is an integral part of an aesthetic sensibility. Aesthetic sensibility is needed for understanding the emotional, cultural, and aesthetic (i.e., sensual) impacts of decisions, actions, and situations. Abowitz (2007) provides a quote from Nussbaum (1990) that highlights these linkages:

> The person of practical wisdom lies surprisingly close to the artist and/or the perceiver of art, not in the sense that this conception reduces moral value to the aesthetic value or makes

> moral judgment a matter of taste, but in the sense that we are asked to see morality as a high type of vision and response to the particular, and ability that we seek and value in our greatest artists…whose value for us is above all practical and never detached from our questions about how to live (Nussbaum 1990, p. 84, cited in Abowitz 2007).

The "seeing" or aesthetic sensibility of wisdom allows for creative—yet somehow real or truthful—insights that draw out the underlying "aesthetic" of a situation. Aesthetic sensibility highlights how the system understanding of distinctions, systems, relationships, and perspective or DSRP (Cabrera et al. 2008) work together (or not), tapping emotions, insights, and intuition that are necessary for creatively coming to wise actions and solutions.

Thus, wisdom seems to exhibit important aesthetic elements. Consideration of design and the "aesthetics," if you will, of the decision or action are part and parcel of wisdom. The capacity to see how the elements that constitute the situation relate to each other and to evolve a creative forward looking decision or action out of complex interrelationships is an inherently artistic or design-related endeavor.

## Balancing and Integrating for Wisdom

Wisdom, as Weick (2004) has pointed out, involves understanding what is known and, importantly, what is not known. In fact, Weick offers a definition of wisdom with just that quality, "Wisdom is a quality of thought that is animated by a dialectic in which the more one knows, the more one realizes the extent of what one does not know" (Weick 2004, p. 662; see also, McKenna et al. 2009). But it also involves being able to make decisions or take actions with a holistic sense of what is appropriate (ethically, systemically, and artistically), without getting paralyzed by those unknowns or by the situation's complexity, ambiguity, and even paradoxical nature. From a developmental perspective, the capacity to deal with the type of ambiguity or paradoxes posed by "not knowing," as Weick describes wisdom, is more likely than not to be found at post-conventional levels of development (Kegan 1994; Kohlberg 1973, 1976; Gilligan 1982), which Torbert and Associates' (2004) work has shown most individuals, including leaders, do not yet reach. So helping learners achieve post-conventional thinking, or at least move towards it, is our challenge as instructors in subjects where we want people to make wiser, i.e., more responsible and ethical, decisions for the greater good.

Above, I argued that the three attributes of wisdom as defined here—moral imagination, systems understanding, and aesthetic sensibility, are related to philosophers' constant quest for understanding the good, the true, and the beautiful and that all are needed for the development of wisdom. By implication, then, to become wise and responsible leaders, people need develop capacities for balancing the integration of capabilities in all three of these domains, which means that they need to develop not just intellectually (cognitively—systems understanding), but also emotionally (heart—both moral imagination and aesthetic sensibility) and spiritually (soul/spirit—aesthetic sensibility), in the secular sense of being able to ask bigger questions about meaning, purpose, and priorities.

Balancing the moral, systems, and aesthetic dimensions of wisdom requires a complex set of capabilities in the person that draw upon resources of the heart, mind, spirit/soul, and even body. Wise people, that is, are individuals who can draw from the full array of resources that people can bring to a situation, rather than from narrow or single-issue perspectives. The orientation of wisdom to the common good, as opposed to simply the individual good, moves decision making and action away from the relativistic framing of "whose values" should be at play toward more universal values. Donaldson and Dunfee (1999) call such universal values hypernorms, and I have argued elsewhere (Waddock 2004) that there are a set of foundational principles, many of which can be found in the globally agreed documents from which the UN Global Compact's ten principles (arguably hypernorms) are drawn or similar global initiatives like Transparency International. Attaining wisdom—and responsible leadership—is a process rather than a state, and is exemplified in the life narratives of leaders such as the late Ray Anderson, former CEO of Interface, in describing his—and his company's—journey toward sustainability (Anderson 1999, 2009).

Much developmental theory suggests that the capacity to think about these bigger issues and the common good grows as individuals themselves move through developmental stages toward more encompassing and global perspectives (e.g., Kegan 1994; Wilber 1998, 2002; Torbert and Associates 2004). The question, then, is what works in the classroom to move individuals along this path. Basically, I argue that exercises and activities that foster systems thinking, deliberately raise ethical issues, and ask students to thinking about the relationships of various elements in a system to each other (the aesthetic dimension) may well enhance these capabilities. Of course, it is important to recognize that there are limits to what can happen in any one course or during any one period of time, and that developmental theories nearly unanimously indicate that all people must start from "lower" levels of development and move through the various stages sequentially. All of that takes time and can be pushed only so fast.

Further, the issue of balance raises critical questions, such as, what is the relative importance or priority of each element or aspect of wisdom (moral issues, systems understanding, aesthetics)? Who determines this relative priority? How is that relative priority to be determined in a given situation? Whose perspectives and impacts need to be taken into consideration? It is in making a realistic assessment of the situation from the three relevant perspectives—and figuring out what the elusive "common good" actually is that the judgment often associated with wisdom comes in. It is in balancing these competing priorities and interests that the aesthetic dimension of wisdom is so important.

## On Teaching for Wisdom and Ethics

So, having presented a framework for understanding wisdom as the integration of moral imagination, systems understanding, and aesthetic sensibility into decisions and actions in the interest of the greater good, the question now is, how might we begin thinking about educating future or present leaders in ways that foster such development? While I certainly do not have all the answers to this fundamental question, below I will share some thoughts about where we might begin.

If we wish to educate for wisdom—or at least point people in that direction, which may be the best we can do in a relatively short period of time—it is important to consider how the elements of moral imagination, systems understanding, and aesthetic sensibility might be fostered in the classroom. Table 9.1 provides an overview the ways in which several important frameworks on wisdom are aligned with these three elements (albeit these categories can be overlapping, so placement in Table 9.1 is simply with the main element). By looking at these characteristics of wisdom in various theories, we can begin to get a sense of what and perhaps how we need to teach for wisdom.

Let us look at characteristics that we might associate with moral imagination first, which Werhane (1999, p. 93) has defined as "the ability in particular circumstances to discover and evaluate possibilities not merely determined by that circumstance, or limited by its operative mental models, or merely framed by a set of rules or rule-governed concerns." McKenna et al. (2009) offered five "principles" for wise leadership, of which two are most aligned with moral imagination. These characteristics are that wise leaders value human and virtuous outcomes, and display long-term vision and virtue with a commitment to the long term welfare of humanity in general (note the alignment of a bigger vision with Sternberg's definition of wisdom above). Werhane (2002) indicates that wise leaders are self-reflective, can disengage from and be aware of their situations, scripts, or mental models, and have the capacity to evaluate situations morally, while Cabrera et al.'s (2008) concept of perspective suggests that wisdom involves taking new perspectives by transforming one's point-and-view. Sternberg (2001) says wisdom involves applying both tacit and explicit knowledge mediated by values for the common good. From McKee and Barber (1999)'s definition of wisdom, we can pull conative ability, or knowing when to act or not act and freedom from illusion into moral imagination.

Integrating these various perspectives, the skills we would want to educate for to develop moral imagination, i.e., "seeing" moral issues in situations, would seem to be: (1) identification and consideration of the greater or common good, (2) capacity to consider the moral implications and effects of the decision or action on various stakeholders, (3) self-awareness and reflective capacity, (4) the ability to act appropriately in a situation, and (5) the capacity to perspective-take (stand in the "shoes" of others or understand others' points of view) (summarized in Table 9.2).

If we look at systems understanding, we can similarly draw out a number of attributes that could be developed. For example, McKenna et al. (2009) note that wise leaders use reasoned and careful observation, are practical and oriented toward everyday life (which, as noted above, Aristotle called *phronesis*), have cognitive complexity and capacity to deal with complex and ambiguous environments, and are rational and deep thinkers who seek out facts and their origins, characteristics. Werhane (2002) defines systems thinking as "conceiving the system as a whole with interdependent elements, subsystems, and networks of relationships and patterns of interaction." (2008, p. 36), indicating that such holistic thinking and pattern/relationship recognition is crucial to systems thinking. Cabrera et al. (2008) would

**Table 9.1** Attributes, capacities, and characteristics associated with the three elements of wisdom

| Author(s) | Moral imagination | Systems understanding | Aesthetic appreciation |
|---|---|---|---|
| McKenna et al. (2009) | Value humane and virtuous outcomes<br>Display long-term vision and virtue, with a proven commitment to long-term welfare not just of immediate stakeholders but of humanity in general | Reasoned and careful observation<br>Practical and oriented toward everyday life<br>Cognitive complexity and capacity to deal with complex and ambiguous environments<br>Rational and deep thinkers, seeking out facts and their origins | Non-rational and subjective elements when making decisions (e.g., sensory and visceral, metaphysical and even spiritual elements that enable vision, insight and foresight)<br>Understand the aesthetic dimension of their work and intrinsic personal social rewards contributing to the good life<br>Display creativity and judiciously draw on the non-rational as appropriate<br>Articulate, proven capacity to reach people through word, affect, and action |
| Werhane (2002, 2008) | Self-reflection<br>Disengagement and awareness of one's situation, script or mental model<br>Capacity to evaluate situations from a moral perspective | Systems thinking or conceiving the system as a whole with interdependent elements, subsystems, and networks of relationships and patterns of interaction | Ability to imagine new possibilities |
| Cabrera et al. (2008) | Perspective: Take new perspectives by transforming one's point-and-view | Distinctions: draw distinctions between an identity and a non-identity<br>Systems: organize parts and wholes into alternative nested systems | Relationships: recognize the bi-directional properties (affect and effect) of relationships |
| Sternberg (2001) | Apply tacit and explicit knowledge mediated by values for the common good | Understand long and short term interests to balance adaptation to the current environment, and the shaping and selection of new environments | Achieve balance among intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extra personal interests |
| McKee and Barber (1999) | Integrate Conative, knowing when to act, when not to act… (Freedom from illusaion) | Cognitive, balancing knowledge and doubts…(understanding that a given judgment/action is illusory) | Affective abilities, balance intense emotion and detachment (empathy with those trapped in illusion) |

**Table 9.2** Key attributes in teaching for wisdom

| Moral imagination | Systems understanding | Aesthetic sensibility |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Consideration of the greater or common good, | 1. A developed capacity for careful observation of the "reality" of the situation, | 1. An intuitive grasp of the non-rational or observable elements of situations and decisions (which might include affective components, spiritual or meaning-related elements, and sensory aspects), |
| 2. The capacity to consider the moral implications of any situation, | 2. The intellectual or cognitive capacity deal with the complexity and ambiguity inherent in many situations; | 2. Creativity in imagining solutions or future action, |
| 3. Self-awareness and reflective capacity, | 3. The ability to simultaneously see the whole and the constitutive parts in a system, | 3. Understanding of relationships among elements in a system (e.g., people or system elements) in the 'design' sense, and |
| 4. The ability to act appropriately in a situation, and | 4. The foresight to understand the implications of decisions and actions in the future on the system (both long- and short-term), and | 4. The capacity to balancing conflicting elements (again with the greater good in mind) |
| 5. The capacity to perspective-take (stand in the 'shoes' of others or understand others' points of view) | 5. Knowing both what one knows and what one does not know | |

agree, indicating that the ability to draw distinctions between an entity and a non-entity (distinctions), and organize parts and wholes into alternative nested systems (systems) are keys to wisdom. Sternberg (2001) emphasizes understanding long and short-term interest so that balancing adaptation to the current environment and the shaping of new ones can be undertaking is core to wisdom, while McKee and Barber (1999) also talk about cognitive aspects of wisdom as balancing knowledge and doubts.

Summarizing, the key attributes for systems understanding appear to be: (1) a developed capacity for careful observation of the 'reality' of the situation, (2) the intellectual or cognitive capacity deal with the complexity and ambiguity inherent in many situations; (3) the ability to simultaneously see the whole and the constitutive parts in a system, (4) the foresight to understand the implications of decisions and actions in the future on the system (both long- and short-term), and (5) knowing both what one knows and what one does not know (Table 9.2).

Finally, there is aesthetic appreciation. As Table 9.1 indicates, McKenna et al. (2009) note that wisdom involves non-rational and subjective elements of decision making (including sensory and visceral, metaphysical and spiritual elements), understanding aesthetic dimensions off work especially as it contributes to the good life, and creativity and more intuitive (non-rational) abilities to see into a situation, along with the ability to articulate ideas, actions, and affect.

In a similar vein, Werhane (2002) discusses the ability to imagine new possibilities (a creativity characteristic), while Cabrera et al. (2008) suggest that wisdom involves recognizing bi-directional properties of relationships, which is often what artists have to do. Sternberg (2001) follows a similar line of thought arguing for the need to achieve balance among intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extra personal interests (which is also, of course, related to his notion that seeking the common good is core to wisdom), while McKee and Barber (1999) discuss the need to balance intense emotion with detachment.

In sum, the key characteristics of aesthetic sensibility seem to be: (1) an intuitive grasp of the non-rational or observable elements of situations and decisions (which might include affective components, spiritual or meaning-related elements, and sensory aspects), (2) creativity in imagining solutions or future action, (3) understanding of relationships among elements in a system (e.g., people or system elements) in the "design" sense, and (4) the capacity to balancing conflicting elements (again with the greater good in mind). All of these elements are summarized in Table 9.2.

These capacities suggest a penchant for systemic thinking and risk taking. Examples of leaders who have taken such stances, though whether or not their whole being represents wise and responsible leaders I leave to others to determine, include GE CEO Jeff Immelt's design and implementation of GE's innovative Ecomagination program. One might also note former Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott's pushing the company toward sustainability after Hurricane Katrina, in an effort to overcome some of Wal-Mart's many responsibility and societal problems. One could also suggest Microsoft founder and former CEO Bill Gates exhibited ore sight, systems understanding, and wisdom in establishing the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and, not incidentally, calling for a more 'creative capitalism' at the 2008 World Economic Forum. All of these leaders and their enterprises, of course, have their significant problems, but at least with respect to these initiatives, they seem to be exhibiting wisdom and a degree of responsible leadership.

Sternberg (1998) argues that wisdom is not so much 'taught' as it is 'acquired' through experience and over time, which is perhaps why wisdom is often associated with more senior people. Another argument, however, is that because of the demands that wisdom places on people in enterprises and societies today, they need to have developed to (minimally) post-conventional stages of development (e.g., Kegan 1994; Torbert and Associates 2004), which allows for capacity to "see" (Waddock 2010). At post-conventional development, people are more likely to see the moral implications (moral imagination), systemic issues (systems understanding), and aesthetic dimensions (relational issues) in any given situation. The ability to take perspective is crucial—whether it is to separate from self to see the greater good, or to see the parts and the wholes, or to see how elements of a situation relate to each other.

The question, of course, is how to take leaders as learners from whatever stage of development they are in, toward more complex developmental levels where the elements of wisdom and the capacity to "see" into situations is enhanced. Thus, experiences can potentially be offered that have the potential to enhance development. In an earlier paper, I outlined a number of specific classroom approaches that might be used to enhance wisdom (Waddock 2010). Here, however, I want to close by outlining some learning principles based on the elements of wisdom in Table 9.2 that might enhance development toward wisdom and responsible or ethical practice in leaders.

## Experiences Not Lectures

There are many tracts about teaching ethics, some of which involve teaching the philosophical principles that underlie ethical theories, and many involving case studies. Such approaches can enhance general understanding but the development of moral imagination, which Werhane (2002) has linked to systems understanding, suggests the need to develop action- and experience-based approaches that put responsibility for learning in the hands, minds, and hearts of learners rather than in the mind of the instructor. Thus the first principle for enhancing wisdom is to *engage learners in activities, exercises, and experiences that demand their active involvement rather than passive absorption of knowledge*. A second principle is *that such experiences demand that learners begin to understand the whole system and its dynamics, not just fragments or elements*. These principles are particularly true for adult learners (although I believe they apply to all learners) (e.g., Knowles 1980).

The goal is to have learners raise up ethical issues inherent in all situations where decisions and actions are to be taken (moral imagination) and be able to explore them systemically (systems understanding), including thinking through their implications for the future and for how the system itself operates (design or aesthetic sensibility). This action or experience-based orientation would provide the experience, perhaps a role play, perhaps an in-class exercise, perhaps a real-world situation that the learners or someone they know has faced, provides a field in which implications and consequences, impacts on others of the decision or action (including emotional, system, and design issues) can be raised and considered. Particularly for individuals already in leadership positions, exploring such activities through actions can help mitigate what Bird and Waters (1989) called the indiscussability of ethical situations in organizations.

Another way of doing accomplishing the same end would be to have learners undertake projects that involve them with actual enterprises and their members, including leaders and workers, or work-based learning projects, where the consequences are real (Raelin 2000). In part, the effort here is to raise consciousness of the ethical, responsibility, aesthetic, and systems implications of the situation by exposing learners to new situations in new ways and breaking through their conventional ways of understanding. Mirvis describes numerous such instances in his article on consciousness raising of executives, incluing work with Unilever Corporation that has had transformative effects on the company (Mirvis 2008). Using such approaches, both the difficulties of moving organizations toward good decisions are raised and the real-world paradoxes, dilemmas, and ambiguities that are often faced can be raised and dealt with. Importantly, the situation later needs to be debriefed and discussed in the classroom, where all the dynamics can be evaluated and diagnosed from a distance and reflective skills can be enhanced. Such activities can help learners think though what do when there are no easy answers.

The creativity and what Cheit (1984) called problem *finding* as opposed to problem solving (which assumes that the problem is given) involved in coming to best-possible solutions for real-world situations can enhance not just moral imagination, but also both aesthetic sensibility (because design considerations are involved) and systems understanding. This consideration raises another principle for potentially moving toward wisdom: *Highlight complexity, ambiguities, paradoxes, and dilemmas inherent in situations and systems, bring them to light and life, and allow for "good conversations" about them*. "Good conversations" are what Bird and Waters (1989) claimed were missing in organizations. They are conversations that deliberately raise ethical issues, moral dilemmas, and responsibility considerations—and by engendering them in the classroom, we can help develop future leaders capable of both seeing and raising such issues.

## Systems Not Fragments

Focusing a bit more explicitly on systems understanding, we could note that in much of management education, learners find out about fragments or pieces of the whole system, studying specific functions or disciplines, problems of limited scope (or with definitive answers) that are pre-defined, or focus on narrowly-defined issues that seem quite tractable. There is too little opportunity in much of management education for studying even the whole enterprise or even the whole individual, with all the complexities, ambiguities, and paradoxes, never mind looking at the bigger picture of the enterprise or individual within the broader system. True, disciplines like strategic management attempt some of the integrative function of pulling together disciplines and functions of management into the whole and they do tap the industry context, frequently through case studies. And many businesses in society courses do attempt to paint and consider the bigger picture often through cases. But even these case studies are pre-set, typically with problems already identified (or certainly implied in the selection of case material) by the case authors, so that students are not taken on a real journey of discovery for themselves that really helps them engage with an understand the whole system in any depth.

The principle that underlies this brief discussion is *if you want learners to understand whole systems, you need to present whole complex systems comprised of different parts and allow learners to discover what problems, ethical considerations, issues, and situations need to be dealt with and think through how to deal with those issues, and what the implications of their ideas and solutions are*. In this same vein, because real situations are complex, they are fraught with paradox, tensions of opposites, and ambiguities. Although learners may be outside of their comfort zones in dealing with these complexities, it is important that they develop an understanding of how to cope when there are no easy solutions to situations readily available.

To accomplish this task of engaging the whole system, learners need to be exposed to hands-on and to the extent possible real-world issues, problems, and organizations, under the guidance of more knowledgeable individuals like their instructors, who can help them figure out when they are and are not on the right track. They need to be asked to do the diagnostic work of understanding and analyzing the system and its parts and the interrelationships among those parts and to the whole system for themselves, rather than having it pre-digested and handed to them in case form. They need to find or figure out what the problems or issues facing the system are—and what to do about them. More difficult and complex (not to mention riskier for the instructor) to teach, of course, such approaches can involve consulting projects with enterprises, or, alternatively, "live" cases in the classroom in which a manager or group of managers is brought before the students, who can then ask questions and seek to discover what the system looks like.

Other approaches that engage systems understanding, for which classroom versions can be developed, are approaches like open space technology (Owen 1997a, b), future search (Weisbord and Janoff 1995), mind mapping (Buzan 1996), and appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider and Sekerka 2003; Cooperrider and Srivastva 2001; Cooperrider et al. 2001). Techniques from the quality movement like affinity diagrams, brainstorming, flowcharts, and force field analysis, along with asking students to undertake the design of a system, product, or situation themselves, can also be useful in enhancing and developing a degree of systems understanding, and some of these techniques can also enhance aesthetic sensibility as well, because they highlight the ways in which the parts of the system relate to each other in a way that can be called aesthetic.

## Perspective Taking

A core characteristic of post-conventional thinking is the ability to perspective-take, that is, to understand the perspective of others. Fostering this ability, then, becomes a key to developing better relational understanding both of people and of parts of systems. In addition, developing more creativity, intuition, and insight is inherent in enhancing aesthetic appreciation, which inherently deals with the intuitive, emotional, and meaning-making aspects of situations. Artists of all sorts need perspective, as well, in order to "see" situations in the unique ways that art tends to demand. Creating thinking, an aspect of aesthetic sensibility, and opening up to ideas that are different and unusual, that come from sources other than one's self, and that can inspire others are all elements of perspective-taking. These ideas suggest the following principle: *provide opportunities for learners to listen to, see, and experience perspectives other than their own and find ways to help them learn to value those perspectives*.

While perspective-taking of the sort described above is not easily achieved, various learning activities can help to foster this set of skills. For example, role plays, debates, and idea forums like brainstorming, as well as teamwork where there is a reflective component, put students into situations where learning from others is paramount. Especially if learners are then oriented toward developing creative solutions to seemingly intractable problems, they begin to learn that the "wisdom of crowds" (Surowieki 2004) and others' perspectives can be invaluable to good solutions. Many discussions of ethical issues can be enhanced by asking learners to deliberately take the perspective of the people or person who will be affected by the decision at hand—and think about its impacts on them and others.

## Concluding Thought

A caveat may be in order. Many of the learning approaches and methods briefly discussed in the previous section deliberately push learners, whether students in classrooms or executives in management and leadership development programs, out of their current comfort zones. For one thing, many of these approaches rely on what the learners themselves bring to the situation. For another, they tend to put the instructor into the role of facilitator (v. lecturer), and hence not fully in control of what happens. Many learners, particularly younger individuals, who are still developing independent thinking and cognitive capabilities beyond conventional levels of development may believe that they are not actually being taught or learning in such situations, because traditional lecture-based approaches where the instructor has the answers are not in evidence. They can be quite uncomfortable—and even angry—at such approaches, particularly when they are forced by the design of the course to take responsibility for their own learning. Further, instructors in such environments need to learn to "trust the class" to raise the necessary issues or guide them gently toward relevant conversations and insights, without being overly directive. This challenge, however, is also the benefit of facilitated instruction, be both learners and instructor can engage with the learning—and both learn!

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# Contributor Biographies

**Professor Richard Brown**
Rich Brown earned his Ph.D. in Theatre with an emphasis in acting, directing and devising from the University of Oregon. After training with master teachers Stephen Wangh and Mary Overlie at NYU Tisch's Experimental Theatre Wing, Rich landed at Western Washington University in 2006 where he currently teaches Grotowski-inspired psychophysical acting, Suzuki, Viewpoints, commedia, and classes in devising. He has published in *Theatre Topics*, *Theatre Journal*, and *The Western States Theatre Review*; presented at six Association of Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) conferences on devising; performed with Mary Overlie in the Shady Corners Performance Art Festival, and co-founded Theatre 88 in New York. Rich studied with Anne Bogart's SITI Company's summer intensive training and at the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre.

**Professor John Dobson**
John Dobson is a Professor of Finance at California Polytechnic State University, in San Luis Obispo. His primary research interests are financial ethics, the application of virtue ethics to finance, and the connection between aesthetics and business ethics. His most recent book is *The Art of Management and the Aesthetic Manager.*

**Professor Craig Dunn**
Craig P. Dunn is Associate Dean and Director of Graduate Programs within the College of Business and Economics at Western Washington University andan Associate Professor Emeritus of San Diego State University, in bothinstances specializing in business and society issues. His research interests include managerial ethics and values, corporate socialresponsibility, corporate governance, the meaning of work, and socialentrepreneurship. He is active in the International Association for Business and Society (IABS), serving on the Board of Directors as well as Past President. Craig was guest editor for an influential special issue of Business Horizons, July-August, 1991. His articles have also appeared in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Business Ethics Quarterly, Journal of Management Education*, *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, *Journal of Nonprofit Management*, *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, *Journal of International*

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*Management*, *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *Selected Readings for CPAs in Industry*, *Dictionary of Business Ethics*, and *Mapping Strategic Thought*.

**Professor Ronald Duska**

Ronald F. Duska, Ph.D., is the President of Duska Business Ethics Consulting, where he engages in business ethics consulting, lecturing, workshops, and developing and presenting continuing education programs. He is also president of the Society for Business Ethics, the publisher of *Business Ethics Quarterly.* Currently, he is an adjunct professor at St. Joseph's and Villanova Universities. His web site is www.businessethicszone.com. He held the Charles Lamont Post Chair of Ethics and the Professions at The American College from 1996 until July of 2011, He is the author, co-author and editor of numerous articles as well as several books, including: *Accounting Ethics* (2nd edition); *Business Ethics*(2nd edition)*; Ethics for the Financial Services Professional*; *Contemporary Reflections on Business Ethics; Organizational Behavior in Insurance; The Next Phase of Business Ethics: Integrating Psychology and Ethics; Moral Development: A Guide to Piaget and Kohlberg; Ethics and Corporate Responsibility: Theory Cases and Dilemmas;* and *Education, Leadership, and Business Ethics: A Symposium in Honor of Clarence Walton.*

**Professor Dawn R. Elm**

Dawn Elm is a Professor of Management and Ethics at the Opus College of Business at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. Her primary research interest is in ethical decision-making with many publications in the field regarding that topic over the past 20 years. Her most recent work is in distinguishing ethical decision-making from other forms of decision-making as well as the integration of the arts into learning, decision-making and business ethics.

**Professor Daryl Koehn**

Daryl Koehn is a Full Professor in the Ethics and Business Law department at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis. Her books include *The Ground of Professional Ethics*, *Rethinking Feminist Ethics*; *Local Insights, Global Ethics for Business*; *The Nature of Evil;* and *Living with the Dragon.* Her edited volumes include *Corporate Governance: Ethics across the Board*; *Trust: Barriers and Bridges*; and *Business, Corporate Governance and Civil Society* (ed. with Professor Lu Xiaohe, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences). Professor Koehn regularly publishes in business newspapers and journals. She is routinely quoted in *The New York Times* and has been interviewed multiple times on National Public Radio. She has been profiled in *Time* and *Life* magazines and has published twice in the *Harvard Business Review.* She is the past president of the Society for Business Ethics. She chaired the ethics subcommittee of Houston's 2012 bid for the Olympics and has appeared as a leading ethics expert witness in civil trials.

**Professor Christopher Michaelson**

After earning a Ph.D. in philosophical aesthetics and ethics, Christopher Michaelson defied philosophical and practical logic to launch a business advisory career in

New York. A few years later, he began his academic career while leaving a foot in practice. He is an Associate Professor in Ethics and Business Law at the University of St. Thomas, Opus College of Business and has also taught in the Business and Society Program at New York University's Stern School of Business since 2005. Christopher's business clients have included major multinational corporations, along with government and non-governmental organizations and multilateral financial institutions. His research uses art, architecture, literature, and film to explore meaningful work, global ethics, and emerging risks.

**Professor Steven S. Taylor**
Steven Taylor is an Associate Professor in the School of Business at the Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA. His research focuses on the aesthetics of organizational action and reflective practice. Recently his academic work has focused on theorizing what business can learn from the arts and management as craft. He is the author of the book *Leadership Craft, Leadership Art*, and is the editor of the journal *Organizational Aesthetics*. Steve is also a playwright whose work has been performed in England, France, Poland, Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, Italy, Australia, and the USA.

**Professor Sandra Waddock**
Sandra Waddock is the Galligan Chair of Strategy, Carroll School Scholar of Corporate Responsibility, and a Professor of Management at the Carroll School of Management, Boston College. Author/editor of ten books and more than 100 papers, she focuses on corporate responsibility, system change, the problem of growth, wisdom, and management education. Her latest book is *Building the Responsible Enterprise* (with Andreas Rasche).

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